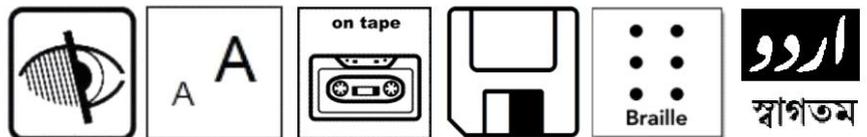


Equalities Strategy 2009/2012



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1. Introduction

Rossendale is proud of the diversity of the people and the communities of Rossendale. The Council is committed to ensuring that everyone will have an equal chance to fulfil their potential and enjoy a good quality of life. It is acknowledged that people face barriers to social and economic inclusion, to good health and housing, to learning and access to services. The Council is committed to understanding and removing the barriers that lead to disadvantage and inequality.

The Council is dedicated to ensuring that equality influences the way we develop and deliver services and the way we employ and develop staff irrespective of their gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, age, religion, belief or disadvantage.

2. Our Vision

Rossendale Borough Council and the Rossendale Local Strategic Partnership share a vision that Rossendale will have strong communities with an enhanced environment and heritage. It will be an attractive place to live, where tourists visit and employers invest. This vision is articulated in Rossendale's Sustainable Community Strategy. The Strategy has three interconnected priorities: People, Places and Prosperity. Whilst the strategy is divided into these priorities, they must not be taken in isolation as they link together, each having an impact on the other. Our vision is to enable people to maximise their opportunity and so no one within our communities will be disadvantaged by where they live. The Council's contribution to the vision is explained within its Corporate Plan. Progress against the Plan is reviewed annually via the Council's Annual Report

3. Cohesive Communities

Rossendale Borough Council and the Local Strategic Partnership have a Community Cohesion Policy Statement which explains their commitment to building and strengthening cohesive communities across the Borough. This commitment is mainstreamed through Rossendale's Neighbourhood Forum and the development and delivery of Rossendale's Neighbourhood Plans.

4. National & Local Context

The Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' strongly identified that Local Authorities have a key role to play in promoting cohesion, as part of their community leadership and place-shaping role.

The 2007 'Our Shared Future' report by the Commission on Integration & Cohesion set out a framework and key principles to develop cohesive communities. The report also highlights the importance of generating accurate local intelligence to strengthen local leadership and help Councils meet local needs.

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Authorities also have a legal duty to promote good relations between people as part of equality legislation such as the race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

The Equality Bill 2009, confirms that everyone has the right to be treated fairly and equally. The purpose of the Bill is to bring together all existing equality legislation together in one Act to strengthen existing laws.

The Equality Bill will strengthen our Equality Law by:

- Introducing a new public sector duty to consider reducing socio-economic inequalities.
- Put a new Equality Duty on public bodies.
- Use public procurement to improve equality.
- Ban age discrimination outside the workplace.
- Introduce gender pay and equality reports.
- Extend the scope to use positive action.
- Strengthen the powers of employment tribunals.
- Protect carers from discrimination.
- Protect breastfeeding mothers.
- Ban discrimination in private Members clubs.
- Strengthen protection from discrimination for disabled people.

5. What do cohesive communities mean for Rossendale?

Building cohesive communities is critical to the quality of life for all local people. It brings benefits by creating a society in which people from different backgrounds and circumstances can live and work together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Equality is an underpinning aspect of cohesion. Community cohesion is about understanding one another better, building bridges between neighbourhoods regardless of relative wealth and poverty, gender, age, race, religion or sexual orientation.

6. Rossendale Borough Council is committed to:

- Providing leadership & coordination to embed equalities in everything we do.
- To have a workforce that represents the community we serve.
- Promote equality of opportunity.
- Mainstream equality of opportunity and the development of cohesive communities through its Neighbourhood Forums and through the development of Neighbourhood Plans underpinned by priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy, Corporate Plan and Lancashire Local Area Agreement.
- Actively challenge and combat prejudice in any form and racist and/or discriminatory myths
- Work in partnership with others in order to meet the differing needs of communities within our Borough.

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- Continue to support 'Pride in Rossendale' and community pride grants that contribute to community cohesion.
- Ensure robust Community Impact Assessments are undertaken on all Council policies and policy decisions, taking into account potential impacts on our customers or communities, and where possible to eliminate or reduce this.
- Map our community – work in partnership to strengthen our neighbourhood intelligence and our understanding of who makes up our communities and their needs – and importantly, using the information to identify tensions and opportunities.
- Drive a sense of a 'shared future' – where there is an emphasis on what binds our communities together rather than what differences divides them.
- To seek to influence partner organisations and commitment to equality.
- To encourage individuals to report all forms of discrimination and to resolve complaints and incidents promptly.

7. Minority Groups

The Council has a duty to produce Equality Schemes for Gender, Disability and Race. These scheme have been refreshed into one single scheme which explains how the Council will ensure it meets it's legal duty in relation to equalities.

7.1 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.

7.2 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 will positively embrace the requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the recommendations from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry.

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7.3 Age Discrimination

The Employment Equality Age Regulations came into force 1st October 2006, and, we are committed to ensuring services and employment are equally accessible to all regardless of age. The regulations prohibit discrimination, harassment and victimisation in employment and vocational training.

7.4 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 disabled people to reach their full potential or to have equal access to services. We will take all reasonable steps to ensure access to services and employment opportunities, which will comply with the DDA.

7.5 Sexual Orientation

The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regs became law 1st December 2003. We recognise that lesbians and 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. 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.

7.6 Religion and Belief

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations became law 1st December 2003. We respect the right of employees and individuals not to be discriminated against because of their religious or non-religious beliefs. 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 as necessary.

8. Profile of Rossendale Borough Council

- The population of Rossendale is 67,000
- 94.5% of the population is white,
- 0.9% are mixed race,
- 3.9% are Asian/ Asian British,
- 0.3% are Black/Black British,
- 0.4% are Chinese or other.
- The two largest religions in Rossendale are Christian (76%) and Muslim (2.9%)
- 14.5% of the population are aged 65.
- Life Expectancy at birth is low at 75.4 years for men and 80.3 years for women

Source:http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/office_of_the_chief_executive/lancashire_profile/maps/rosoas.asp

- 7.91% of people aged 16-74 are permanently sick/disabled,

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- 51% of the population are female,
- 49% of the population are male,
- 74 Households are living as same sex couples.

Source: Office for National Statistics 9.11.2004

9. Workforce Profile of Rossendale Borough Council Source: CHRIS as at 1.1.2009

Employee monitoring is in place for gender, age, ethnicity, disability utilising the CHRIS Human Resources system. Individual service areas review their workforce profile on an annual basis, analysing any issues and forecasting any areas of concern. This is based on information collated each December of each year and is linked to the Business Planning process. The Corporate Pay and Workforce Strategy analyses the position of the whole Council in relation to workforce trends. This activity is undertaken every three years.

9.1 Total Employees:

Rossendale's workforce numbers 229 employees including casuals (204FTE) as at 1 January 2009. Since 2006, the number of total number of employees has reduced from 280 to 229. 209 employees (91.26%) enjoy permanent contracts – the remaining 20 (8.73%) employees are either temporary or casual employees.

9.2 Gender Profile

The headcount of 229 includes 194 full time posts (84.7%) and 24 part time posts (10.48%) whilst the gender profile is 130 males (56.70%) and 99 females (43.23%) Although the current local government gender profile has a female-male gender split of 70 – 30, this is heavily influenced by the Counties, Mets, Unitaries and London Boroughs which all include the Education and Social Services functions. Rossendale's profile reflects a normal district profile which excludes those functions but includes the service areas of Communities, Planning, and Operations.

9.3 Ethnicity:

Of the current headcount of 229, the ethnicity of 14 employees is not declared. Analysis of the remaining 215 employees indicates a predominately white workforce of 207 with the remaining 8 employees having an ethnic split as follows:-

White Other	3
Pakistani	4
Bangladeshi	1

9.4 Disability:

There are currently 11 employees with a declared disability.

9.5 Age Profile:

The current age profile is as follows:

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AGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
16-18	1	0.43%
19-24	13	5.67%
25-39	55	24.01%
40-49	79	33.18%
50-59	55	24.01%
60-65	25	10.92%
Over 65	4	1.74%

The age profile is predominantly aged between 40 and 49 years. In addition there a number of younger people and generally distribution of younger and older employees.

9.6 Pay:

The current headcount of 229 includes 73.80% employees on former manual and craft grades. The pay profile of the remaining employees is as follows:-

Scale 7-9	47	→	20.52%
Principal Officer	4	→	1.75%
C.O/C Exec	4	→	1.75%
Others	5	→	2.18%

Employment Targets Source: Resources Business Plan 2009/10

	Target 2008/9	Outturns 2008/9	Target 2009/10	Target 2010/11	Target 2011/12
Percentage of Employees with a Disability	6.00%	5.12%	6.00%	6.50%	7.00%
Percentage of Employees from Black Minority Ethnic Communities	2.50%	2.30%	2.50%	3.00%	3.00%
Equality Standard for Local Government replaced by the Equality Framework	3	3	Achieving	Achieving	Achieving
% of employees who were aware of the Equalities Strategy	No measure	No Measure	90.00%	No Measure	90.00%

10. Equality in Employment

Rossendale Borough Council has a comprehensive Equal Opportunities Policy, 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.

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The implementation of equality of opportunity in recruitment and selection should ensure that the Council recruits the best people for the job and achieves the best return for it's investment.

Monitoring and reviewing of all employment related practices is essential if the Council are to identify how effective it is 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 performance reports for the Portfolio Holder, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Management Team on the employment activities of the Council.

11. Elected Members

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, issued by the Department of Transport, Local Government and Regions, which all members will be required to observe.

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 employees.

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.

12. Equality in Service Delivery

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.

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,

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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 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 effectively 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.

13. Consultation Monitoring and Review of Service

The Council has a responsibility to address any inequalities within the services it provides. The Council will, where applicable, address any inequities in the services it provides. Monitoring and reviewing of all service strategies and policies is essential if the Council is to identify how effective it is in combating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity. The Council will do this by:

- Assisting managers in developing or improving existing monitoring systems to ensure informative equality data is collected.
- Promoting the equality monitoring guidelines.
- Examining all monitoring systems for compliance with corporate standards and equalities legislation.
- 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 Business and Action Plans.
- Implementation of the Corporate 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 Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Producing a six monthly report for the Council's Performance 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.

14. Contractors and Partners

The Council has developed a Procurement Strategy which articulates how the Council will procure goods and services taking Equality considerations into account. The Council has

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established a common standard for assessing contractors' compliance this is monitored by the Finance Section. By using this standard the Council is encouraging contractors to implement equality practices that seek to promote positive action towards creating a level playing field for members of the community.

15. Complaints and Harassment incorporating Dignity at Work

The Council takes complaints about the services it provides 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 incorporating Dignity at Work Procedure to deal with complaints from employees.

The Council has also introduced measures to record complaints and incidents which are of a racial nature, or perceived to be of a racial nature.

All complaints are subject to a full investigation in accordance with the Rossendale Borough Council's complaints or Health and Safety incident reporting procedures and quarterly monitoring arrangements are in place.

16. Provision of Information

The Council will provide information in printed form and via the Council website. On request, we will provide translations into ethnic minority languages and other formats including, large print, Braille, CD or tape. Additionally, employees and staff in the Council's One Stop Shop can directly access interpretation and translation services for assistance in dealing effectively with customers whose first language is not English.

17. Our Approach to Equality

Elected Members

Over the next three 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 an Equalities Champion, lead member responsible for equality and who will act as the political interface for the strategy. Progress in relation to Equalities will be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees Policy and Performance.

Managers

The Council has established a Corporate Policy Steering Group to monitor progress in relation to the Equalities Framework and a Corporate Community Impact Assessment Group to monitor the Community Impact Assessments and Corporate Equality Action Plan. 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.

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.

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18. Communication of the Equality Strategy

All Members and new staff will be notified of their personal obligations as part of the Council's induction process. Individual progress will be monitored through the Council's annual appraisal process and supervisory process under the Core Competency: Customers Matters.

19. Training

The Council has a proactive approach to training and development, to meet the needs of different learners. This has been in the form of compulsory equality awareness raising sessions for all employees on the Equality Strands, to the use of Theatre workshops to ensure that employees are fully aware of the impact of harassment. The capacity of the training on offer has been built through partnership working via Team Lancashire which has funded training on Community Cohesion for Members and Officers. Practical developments have also been delivered in partnership with Pendle Borough Council on the Muslim culture.

Formal training on the completion on the Community Impact Assessment process has also been carried out and learning is shared across the Council.

The theme of equalities and fairness is applicable in relation to other areas of training for example training in relation to communication, effective consultation and recruitment and selection.

20. Action Plans

As part of the scrutiny of the Community Impact Assessments and Business Plans a Corporate Equality Action Plan is maintained.

21. Outcomes

- **Providing equal and fair treatment:** We will strive to ensure that the needs of all communities are not overlooked, that they feel valued and included in our community and that they have both the opportunity and 'know how' to register and voice their opinions and influence their local services.
- **Ensuring we meet the different needs of our workforce and communities:** We will ensure that the Council and the organisations it works with conform to the highest levels of equalities good practice.
- **Supporting communities to deal with the impact of economic decline:** Rossendale is perceived as a relatively affluent Borough. However, this hides real pockets of deprivation. We will help local communities to deal with increasing levels of unemployment, closure of shops and services and other issues that that have a negative impact on our neighbourhoods. Regeneration of our town centres will be a priority.

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- **Supporting our rural communities:** We will engage with our rural communities and understand the challenges and inequalities they face. Further we will help communities to tackle the divide between urban and rural communities.
- **Transport:** We will seek to further improve the ability to travel across the valley between the east and west of the Borough and to moorland areas.
- **Supporting different age groups & encouraging respect and understanding among them:** We will bring communities and the people within those communities closer together via positive engagement. We will seek to ensure that young people and older people are able to voice their views and play a full part in society as active citizens.
- **Health & Wellbeing:** People in Rossendale don't live as long as elsewhere (75 years), this is below the national average. Even within the Borough there are differences between wards. We will help to tackle inequalities in health by working with partners and the community to improve health outcomes and to ensure citizens play a more active role in their community.
- Promoting people getting on well together through **education** in schools, colleagues and adult education.
- **Ensuring people feel safe in their communities:** We will work together with partners to reduce hate incidents and crimes across Rossendale and increase the reporting of incidents of hate crime. We will support and develop existing services offered to victims and act strategically to promote a multi-agency approach for dealing with hate crimes and incidents across the Borough.
- **Valuing difference:** We value the fact that Rossendale has a variety of different communities and will promote respect and understanding between them.
- **Encouraging participation in local decision making:** We will encourage people from all backgrounds and circumstances to participate in local decision making and to ensure their views and opinions are heard/inform council service improvement and decision.
- **Taking care of our Borough:** We will encourage people from all backgrounds and circumstances to be more aware of their impact on the environment and to think and act responsibly to ensure a better environment for all.

22. Review

This strategy will be reviewed in 2012.

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