

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY POLICY

Making a difference

Making equality of opportunity a reality



Table of Contents

	Foreword	2
1.	Introduction and Background	3
	1.1 Purpose and Aim of Policy	3
	1.2 Scope	3
	1.3 The Law and Legal Duties	4
2.	Policy Statement	4
	2.1 Our Principles and Values	4
	2.2 Equality in the Delivery of Services	5
	2.3 Monitoring in the Delivery of services	5
	2.4 Commissioning, Procurement and Supply Chain Management	5
	2.5 Equality in Employment	6
	2.6 Monitoring in Employment	6
	2.7 Recruitment and Selection Practices	7
	2.8 Learning and Development Opportunities	7
	2.9 Dignity at Work Procedure	8
	2.10 Conduct Procedure	8
3	Consultation and Engagement	8
4	Management and the Supervision of this Policy	8
5	Communicating this Policy	9
6	Implementation	9
7	Monitoring Arrangements	10
8	Breaches of Policy	10
9	Review of this Policy	10




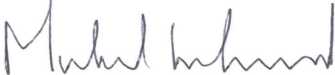
Foreword

Harrow is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse boroughs in London with people of many different backgrounds and life experiences living side by side. It is the richness of this diversity, and the positive impact that it has on the borough and our community, that we believe helps make Harrow such a great place to live, work and visit. We know that the borough's diversity is something to value and encourage and this Equality of Opportunity Policy highlights our commitment to maintaining and building on our strengths by ensuring equality and diversity is integral to everything we do.

In serving a diverse population, the Council aims to ensure there is equality of opportunity for its residents, service users, employees, elected members, stakeholders and partner organisations irrespective of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. We first issued a policy statement on equal opportunities in 1980 and have since introduced numerous programmes to promote equality of opportunity for our employees and our service users.

However, we recognise that in our society, groups and individuals continue to be unlawfully discriminated against and we acknowledge our responsibilities to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations within the rich diversity of Harrow's communities.

Our aim in producing this new and comprehensive policy is to demonstrate our wholehearted commitment to continued action in tackling inequality.

	
	
Leader of the Council	Chief Executive

Copies of this policy are available in alternative languages and in large print or Braille. It is also available on computer disk and audiocassette.

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1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Purpose and Aim of Policy

This Equality of Opportunity policy supports and underpins our corporate Equality Objectives, which have been developed through in depth consultation with our residents, service users, stakeholders, partners and employees. Our Equality Objectives will assist the Council to meet the aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty by having due regard to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This Policy is also a statement of how we intend to tackle discrimination and harassment and promote equality. We consider it important for the Council to have an Equality of Opportunity Policy because we recognise that:

- oppression, disadvantage and discrimination still exists in society;
- some people may be unfairly denied access to services or employment (or both);
- discrimination and disadvantage undermines the equality of life for people in Harrow;
- people may experience multiple discrimination, e.g. on the grounds of ethnicity and disability.

This Equality of Opportunity Policy demonstrates our commitment to address these issues and take action to seek to put this imbalance right. It will also help us to make sure that everyone has equal access to services and employment and to raise the quality of life of everyone who lives and works in Harrow.

We aim to ensure that all groups and individuals within our community and workforce have equal opportunity to benefit from the services and employment opportunities we provide. No service user or potential service user, employee or potential employee will be unlawfully discriminated against due to their characteristic(s) listed below.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to all Council employees and services, and services delivered by third parties on behalf of the Council. We will work towards tackling discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the grounds of the following characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief

- Sex (formally known as gender)
- Sexual Orientation

This policy applies to all employees and elected members of the Council and is incorporated in their Codes of Conduct. We will also work with our stakeholders, contractors and partners to influence their policies and ensure their practices reflect the objectives set out in this policy.

1.3 The Law and Legal Duties

The Council also recognises its statutory equality duty under legislation in terms of service provision and employment and is committed to meet them by complying with this policy.

Elected members, managers and employees will help to change the way we work so that equality is at the heart of all our activities. We will improve equality practice at a corporate and service level and meet our legal obligations and statutory duty by having due regard to:

- 1 Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- 2 Advancing equality of opportunity between people from different groups; and
- 3 Fostering good relations between people from different groups.

We will ensure that we assess how our policies, procedures and services can meet the needs of all (especially disadvantaged) people in our community.

2. Policy Statement

Harrow Council is committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity in all that we do.

We recognise and value the strength of diversity and aim to treat all people with dignity and respect whilst recognising the value of each individual and the positive contribution they make to Harrow's diverse community and workforce.

2.1 Our Principles and Values

Our Equality of Opportunity Policy is underpinned by a number of principles and values, which are to:

- Implement our equality policies to ensure that employment and service delivery policies address the needs of our diverse communities.
- Ensure services are responsive and truly accessible to our customers and service users;
- In partnership with the Trades Unions and workforce, plan, develop and maintain effective communication and information solutions so that the Council can deliver cost effective and accessible services in the context of an appropriate work life balance;
- Ensure our workforce has the skills and competencies required to deliver a high quality service through effective recruitment, selection and development of employees;
- Encourage partnership and participation in the development and application of the our policies, practices and services;
- Work actively to eliminate all forms of unlawful discrimination, both direct and indirect that is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.

2.2 Equality in the Delivery of Services

As a service provider, we are committed to ensuring our services are open, fair and accessible by taking into consideration the needs and requirements of our diverse community and service users. We will continue to improve our services by:

- ensuring that people have the opportunity to engage with and participate in the planning and delivery of services;
- delivering services which are relevant, accessible and of the highest possible quality;
- providing clear information about our services and where necessary in accessible formats;
- providing training for all our employees and members to ensure they have a good understanding of our diverse communities and their needs;
- assessing the impact and monitoring of our services to ensure they do not discriminate and make improvements where possible through a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process; and
- encouraging our partnership agencies and commissioned service providers to contribute to the implementation of this policy.

2.3 Monitoring the Delivery of Services

We will make arrangements for monitoring service delivery and the usage of services by our service users as well as the regulatory and enforcement functions. We will monitor by the relevant Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010:

- how often and why these groups use a service, how often they experience enforcement or legal action, how often they make complaints and why, and whether they face disadvantage or find that their needs are not met;
- whether people from all groups are equally satisfied with the way they are treated;
- whether services are provided effectively to all communities; and
- whether services are suitable and designed to meet varied needs of the community.

2.4 Commissioning, Procurement and Supply Chain Management

- The Equality Act 2010 commits the Council to ensure that contractors, suppliers and funded service providers also abide by the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. We will ensure that our contractors and those providing a service on our behalf provide an affective and appropriate service to all communities. We will ensure that:
 - this policy is communicated to all potential contractors and service providers;
 - contractors and service providers have Equality and Diversity policies, procedures and practices that do not discriminate;
 - those acting on our behalf will develop and deliver goods, facilities and services that are appropriate and accessible;
 - we will provide opportunities for all to be in a position to bid and win council contracts from an equal basis; and
 - we will monitor whether contracts and service arrangements do meet these equality and diversity commitments.

2.5 Equality in Employment

As an employer, we are committed to ensuring that we provide equality of opportunity to all in employment. We are also committed to employing a diverse workforce, to help us to understand and relate to the community we serve and ensure we develop and provide appropriate services for the diverse community of Harrow. Through our recruitment policies and practices we will aim to eliminate barriers and encourage applicants from all sections of the community.

We will achieve this by:

- ensuring that our recruitment and selection policies and procedures are fair and equitable so that the best people are appointed to deliver our services;
- encouraging people from across Harrow's diverse communities to join our workforce;
- only considering applicants for jobs on the basis of their relevant experience, skills and abilities unless a Genuine Occupational Qualification (GOQ) exists for specific posts;
- using appropriate lawful methods, including positive action, to address the under-representation of any group which the Council identifies as being under-represented in particular types of jobs;
- shortlisting and interviewing all disabled applicants who meet the essential criteria of the post in line with our commitment to the 'Positive about Disabled People' initiative;
- ensuring that all employees receive fair and equal treatment in relation to their employment, regardless of whether they are part-time, full-time or employed on a temporary basis;
- ensuring that our employment policies and opportunities are of the highest possible quality, therefore equality, equity and consistency are embedded in practices, pay and conditions;
- making sure that we give equal consideration to people's needs and develop flexible and responsive employment opportunities to address those needs;
- encouraging and supporting employees to reach their full potential within the resources we have available to us;
- provide training to relevant employees so that they can actively put this policy into practice;
- taking appropriate action against incidents of harassment, bullying or discrimination, and offering support and advice to victims or witnesses to incidents; and
- taking disciplinary action against employees who discriminate against people who work for the council or who seek employment with the council.

2.6 Monitoring in Employment

In order to assess the impact of our policies and practices and comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, we will monitor by the Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 for the following:

- the number of part-time/full-time staff by protected group (given that women usually make up the majority of part-time staff)
- recruitment, training, performance assessment, promotion, redundancy, and leavers
- grievances, including reported incidences of harassment

- the rates of return to work of women on maternity leave (allowing you to check how your rates compare with those of other similar organisations)
- contract workers
- the results of staff satisfaction surveys by protected group
- public office holders such as the members of our Board or committees.

Where such monitoring does not currently take place, realistic targets will be set to implement this. Regular reports will be produced from this monitoring process and the outcomes taken into account in the development of policies, practices and procedures, in consultation with directorates, the Corporate Equalities Group, trade unions and other relevant organisations. Results of monitoring will be reported and published annually.

2.7 Recruitment and Selection Practices

Those involved in recruitment and selection will be required to follow the Council's policy guidelines as set out in the Council's recruitment and selection procedure. The Human Resources and Development Service will regularly review and monitor use of this policy as part of equality in employment monitoring.

The Policy stipulates:

- a job description and person specification must be drawn up for every vacancy and provided to all prospective employees;
- information about job vacancies must be made available to all sections of the community (except in situations where, in line with relevant employment legislation and the Council's Redundancy & Redeployment Policy external advertising of vacancies is restricted to protect existing employees whose jobs are potentially at risk);
- all job applicants should be given details of the selection process in advance;
- all shortlisting criteria must be based on the person specification;
- all selection decisions must be made on the basis of merit;
- all those involved in recruitment and selection should receive training in the Council's recruitment and selection procedures.

2.8 Learning and Development Opportunities

We are committed to the personal development of every employee. A range of opportunities are available for continuous learning and development to improve career prospects including training, secondment and work shadowing.

Learning and development opportunities will be targeted as part of positive action measures where certain groups are underrepresented in the workforce.

Where employees with disabilities undertake learning and development, appropriate arrangements will be made as necessary to ensure that all opportunities are equally accessible.

We will ensure that those working part-time or irregular hours have equal access to learning and development opportunities as for those on full-time, standard, hours.

2.9 Dignity at Work Procedure

The Council is committed to creating a working environment where every employee is treated with dignity and respect and where each person's individuality and sense of self worth within the workplace is maintained. Harassment or bullying within the workplace is unacceptable and any employee who feels s/he is being harassed can complain without fear of being victimised or isolated. The Council's Dignity at Work Procedure provides a clear and effective process for handling complaints and provides for support to those making a complaint.

2.10 Conduct Procedure

The Council's Conduct procedures have been developed in consultation with the trade unions. Under this procedure, unlawful discrimination against employees, clients or members of the public can amount to gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal.

3. Consultation and Engagement

Consultation and engagement with communities and staff provides an important means of enabling those who may be affected by our policies and services to participate in the process of developing them. We will actively develop effective partnerships and consultation mechanisms with community representatives, staff and trade unions to enable us to:

- take into account the needs of service users when developing or reviewing services
- take into account views and opinions of those affected when developing new or reviewing existing policies
- identify user needs in relation to access to information, for example translation and interpretation requirements, providing information in alternative formats, providing hearing loops etc.
- identify user needs in relation to access to buildings for those with particular requirements, for example people who have disabilities, carers with young children or elderly people, etc.
- establish the needs and satisfaction levels of those using our services.
- remove barriers to participation and develop improved ways of consulting
- consult community groups annually on progress made against our 'Equality Objectives' service delivery equality performance indicators

Employees will be asked for their views on a wide range of issues and regular staff attitude surveys will be conducted with the results reported to elected members.

Staff support networks are supported and encouraged. A Disabled Workers Group, Black Workers Group, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Group and Carers Network are established within the Council.

The trade unions are fully consulted in the development of all Council employment policies.

4. Management and Supervision of this Policy

Strong leadership is essential to ensure that this policy is embedded at strategic and service levels of the Council. The portfolio holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate

Services has responsibility for equalities and diversity and a nominated Corporate Director is the Chief Officer (Equality Officer Champion) with responsibility for equality and diversity.

Corporate Strategic Board (CSB)

The Chief Executive with the Corporate Directors are responsible for providing leadership in the implementation of this policy and for ensuring that service planning and performance management systems incorporate specific equality objectives in terms of employment and service provision.

Elected Members

All elected members have overall responsibility for the direction and scrutiny of this policy and will ensure that principles of fairness and equality guide the decision making process. Each year, the Executive of the Council will identify which Portfolio Holder has responsibility for equality and diversity.

Corporate Equalities Group (CEG)

The Corporate Equality Group is chaired by the Officer Champion for equalities and is made up of a representative from each directorate's senior management team, employee support groups, external community groups and the trade unions. The group is responsible for taking a strategic overview of the Council's obligations to and opportunities for promoting equalities, embedding and mainstreaming equalities and diversity across the organisation.

Directorate Equality Task Groups (DETGs)

DETGs have responsibility for ensuring that the policy is adopted, communicated and monitored at a directorate level.

5. Communicating this Policy

All Council employees and elected members will have access to and be informed of this policy and of their responsibilities in relation to it.

All managers will be responsible for ensuring that those they manage are made aware of this policy and that it is brought to the attention of all those who join the Council as part of employee induction processes.

The policy will also be made widely available to members of the community.

All those who provide services on behalf of the Council will be made aware of the Council's policy and the need for them to comply with its provisions.

6. Implementation

Providing fair and equal access to Council Services and Employment and Development Opportunities is the responsibility of the following:-

- **Elected Members** - will be responsible for ensuring that the Council fulfils its duties under the relevant equality legislation and the overall implementation of this policy.
- **Directors and Heads of Service** - will be responsible for ensuring overall progress against their department's equality action plan and in ensuring it contributes fully to a co-ordinated Council strategy.

- **Managers** - all those with management duties have a responsibility for implementing, monitoring and actively promoting this policy. Managers must ensure that those they manage are fully aware of it and their responsibilities in relation to it including the identification of development opportunities to enable staff to put this policy into practice in their work.
- Every manager of services to the public is responsible for making those services equally accessible to all and for taking an active role in implementing their department's action plan. All Managers are expected to take measures to address inequality and promote equal opportunity for all.
- Managers of Council employees have a responsibility to treat employees fairly and with respect and to take action to help and encourage employees achieve their full potential. They also have a responsibility to deal promptly and effectively with concerns expressed by staff in relation to their treatment in the workplace.
- **Employees** - each employee plays an integral part in making this policy effective and should put it into practice in all aspects of their work. If they see unlawful discrimination occurring, they have a duty to report it to a relevant manager so that appropriate action can be taken to remedy the situation.
- **Trade unions** - make a positive contribution and have an important role in developing and implementing the Council's commitment to equality in both employment and service delivery.

7. Monitoring Arrangements

The Council will establish appropriate information and monitoring systems to assist the effective implementation of our Equality of Opportunity Policy. The effectiveness of our Equality of Opportunity Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis in consultation with stakeholders including the recognised trade union(s) if appropriate and action taken as necessary.

8. Breaches of Policy

Breaches of this policy will be managed through the Council's Complaint Policy and employee disciplinary procedures depending on the nature of the breach. Legal action may also be considered where appropriate.

9. Review of this Policy

This policy will be reviewed every three years unless we are required to so due to change of legislation. Such reviews will take into account the views of all relevant stakeholders, both inside and outside the authority as well as elected members, trade unions and other staff groups.

The policy will also be reviewed in the instance of significant changes to equalities legislation and national equality policy to ensure it is current and compliant.