

# **Equality and Inclusion Policy and Objectives**

**April, 2012**

## Introduction

Cheshire East Council is committed to providing high-quality, customer-focused services for all people living in, working in or visiting the area. Promoting fairness and providing equality and inclusion is one of our important ambitions, and relates to:

- Accessing the Council's services
- Accessing employment opportunities with the Council, or with its contractors who supply goods or services to the Council
- Developing policies and plans that impact upon communities and individuals

Through all our work, we are committed to achieving the following outcomes:

- Narrowing the gap between our communities
- Providing access to services for all our communities
- Understanding and reflecting the needs of all our communities
- Fostering good relations with all our communities and partners
- Ensuring our workforce is representative of the communities it serves

## Equality Framework

### Managing Equality and Inclusion at Cheshire East

**The Leader of the Council and Chief Executive** provide leadership and promotion of equality and inclusion throughout the Council.

**Corporate Management Team (CMT)** will be accountable for the implementation and enforcement of this Scheme. This will strengthen the Council's commitment to the Scheme, as it will be owned centrally and not by just one section of the Council. The ethos of the scheme will be thread through all corporate plans and policies and will be apparent in all Council activities.

**Heads of Services and Service Managers** implement Equality Impact Assessments and Equality Schemes in their respective service areas and support staff enabling them to contribute towards the delivery of key objectives in the scheme.

**Performance & Partnerships Team** co-ordinates the Corporate Equality Group, updates equalities policies to reflect current legislation and monitors relevant performance indicators and action plans.

**Corporate Equality Group (CEG)** will help raise the profile of equality and inclusion among all services of the Council. Within this role the CEG will:

- Inform services about key issues affecting the Council in relation to equality and inclusion
- Review, monitor and report progress on dealing with equality and inclusion issues
- Influence and ensure equality and inclusion are embedded into the culture of the organisation

- Steer and advise services in relation to the implementation of our duties under equality legislation

**Human Resources Team** ensures HR policies reflect current legislation and best practice and provides appropriate training and development to Members and employees.

## Equality and Inclusion Policy

This Equality and Inclusion Policy shows how Cheshire East Council intends to meet the duties placed on it by the equality legislation. The Policy is relevant to all activities of the Council and its employees. It takes account of the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010 and includes the Council's Equality Objectives which were agreed in April 2012, following a period of public consultation.

## The Council's Equality Objectives

Our equality objectives have been based on available equalities information from research, consultation, engagement and service level Equality Impact Assessments. They identify specific internal and external targets that will enable the Council to improve the collection of equality information and address the most persistent areas of inequalities faced by both employees and residents. Our objectives are as follows:

### 1. Improve data and needs analysis

Where possible we will collect robust data in our interactions with customers and communities to generate detailed equality information ensuring our services are well balanced and proportionate. We aim to ensure that 100% of data is collected where appropriate for the listed equality protected characteristics over the next 4 years. This will enable us to improve access to services for all as we:

- Capture protected characteristic information at service level where appropriate, which is subjected to annual customer trend analysis
- Develop a robust council wide data set, which is reviewed annually and published on centranet and used in the Equality Impact Assessments process across the organization
- Produce directorate equality action plans that are reviewed annually to address data gaps and issues identified in Equality Impact Assessments
- Place the needs of our customers at the heart of our service and business planning processes
- Design and implement policies and procedures that meet the needs of all our communities

### 2. Better reflect our communities through our workforce profile and training

We will aim to reflect the diversity of the Borough within our workforce with the aim to improve service delivery by reflecting the needs of everyone in the Borough. We aim to achieve a 5% shift in gaps on our employment

profile from 2011-12 over the next 3 years. This will be delivered through staff and Member recruitment and development by:

- Improving workforce planning data to incorporate listed equality protected characteristic information
- Including equality awareness training in corporate staff and Member induction processes
- Introducing general equality awareness raising with all staff using an e-learning package
- Introducing targeted equality training for specific processes, ie. Staff recruitment and disciplinary

### **3. Ensure community engagement and consultation is effective**

Our organisation will improve its understanding of communities within our area, and their perceptions of ourselves, partners and our services. This will be achieved through effective and meaningful consultation and engagement activities. The aim is to foster strong relations allowing customers the opportunity to influence services by:

- Building relationships that enable effective engagement and consultation to be undertaken
- Sharing resources for consultation and engagement activities with our partners and the community and voluntary sector where appropriate
- Reducing the consultation burden through targeted consultation and engagement with our hard to reach communities where appropriate
- Sharing consultation and engagement outcomes and learning between services and partners by publishing results within a shared forum
- Demonstrating how we foster good relations within our communities by achieving excellent status in the Equality Framework for Local Government

### **4. Embed Equalities throughout the Council**

Equality and inclusion will be considered at all levels within the Council to ensure that there is a clear and concise link between strategic thinking and service delivery. We aim to ensure we understand and address the needs of all our communities in all functions by:

- Giving due equality and inclusion considerations to all our decisions taken at both Officer and Member level
- Completing and regularly reviewing Equality Impact Assessments for all our systems, processes and policies including the business plan, service plans and corporate action plans
- Ensuring all commissioned services give equality and inclusion the same importance as the Council
- Developing a culture where staff understand their role in relation to equalities and behavior in a way that illustrates this understanding

These objectives will be delivered through an action plan which is a 'live' document and therefore subject to regular update and review.

## **Equality Impact Assessments Guidance**

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a structured method that enables organisations to examine proposed or existing policies, procedures and functions in order to identify and eliminate (or minimise) any negative impact these may have on any particular group or groups of people. Equality Impact Assessments also help to identify any unmet needs.

To reflect Cheshire East's commitment to equality and inclusion, we will assess all the protected characteristics outlined in the Equalities Act 2010. When undertaking EIAs the Council will ensure that the procedure is straightforward to use and more effective in the assessment of the likely impact of our policies, procedures and functions on all our clients, staff, suppliers and community representatives. Service managers and relevant officers will undertake (EIA) training. The outcomes resulting from the Council's EIA's will be published.

## **Involvement and Consultation**

To ensure the successful delivery of any EIAs the Council understands the significance of qualitative data collection. This very important aspect of the assessment process will need the active involvement and consultation with different groups of people, the organisations representing them, people from across the Council, service users, strategic partners and voluntary and community organisations, including specialist groups.

## **Equality Framework for Local Government**

The Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) builds on and recognises the work that councils have already undertaken under the old Equality Standard for Local Government. It is based on three levels of achievement, 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent'.

## **Training & Development**

Equality and Inclusion training and development will be available for all employees and councillors and will be fully integrated into the councils learning and development program, with additional training available based on job requirements.

# **Legal Framework**

## **Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act brought together nine separate pieces of legislation into one single Act as an attempt to simplify and strengthen the law in important ways which would tackle discrimination and inequality.

The Council's statutory Public Sector Equality Duty came into force on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2011 as part of the Act. The Duty replaces previous duties and extends its range to nine protected characteristics: age (including children and young people), disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The aim of the duty is for public bodies to consider the needs of all individuals in their day to day work, in developing policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. The duty is made up of a 'general' equality duty together with some 'specific' duties which relate to the publication of information.

The general duty states that we must, in the exercise of our organisational functions, have due regard to the need 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
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

These are sometimes referred to as the three aims of the general equality duty. Having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low

## **Human Rights Act 1998**

Public authorities have a duty under the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) to act compatibly with rights under the European Convention for the Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (the Convention). It is unlawful for public authorities to breach Convention rights in any area of their activity, including service provision or employment and work-related activities. Organisations not in the public sector have a duty to act compatibly with Convention rights only in relation to functions of a public nature that they may carry out. The public functions covered by this Code are functions of a public nature under the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA).

## **Procurement**

We have published guidance to ensure that contractors and suppliers meet our legal requirements to promote Equality and Inclusion. This will also cover the need to ensure that contractual arrangements are accessible to small and medium sized enterprises and the voluntary sector. Potential contractors and suppliers are required to provide information on their approach to Equality and Inclusion and evidence that they have relevant systems in place for legal compliance.

In simple terms the aim of the Council's procurement process is to ensure that council contractors represent all business sectors/communities within Cheshire East, that they all have an equality agenda, and that contractors demonstrate and implement their agenda through policies, statements and actions.

The Council will consider Positive Action and Reasonable Adjustments as a way of promoting and attaining a more diverse contractor base.

## **Partnerships**

All partnership working arrangements that the Council participates in will be subject to EIA to ensure that there are no adverse impacts on a particular community as a result of the partnership activity or governance arrangements.

## **Monitoring**

Cheshire East Council has a legal duty to ensure that its services and employment are provided fairly, but without effective equality monitoring the Council will not know whether its equality policies are working. Equality monitoring can help all services to ensure that they are reaching and offering equality of opportunity to all individuals and groups, and can help us to make changes based on facts and not assumptions. To achieve these obligations the Council has adopted the following to ensure monitoring is captured:

## **Equality and Inclusion Action Plan**

The Corporate Equality group will monitor the overall progress of actions and report on a regular basis to the Corporate Management Team.

## **Equality Impact Assessments**

Issues arising from Equality Impact Assessments feed into the Equality and Inclusion Action Plan and are monitored regularly by the Corporate Equality Group.

## **Equality Monitoring**

It is becoming increasingly important for us to monitor who our customers are, and to find out why certain people are not using our services. If we know who our customers are, we will know if, for example, black and minority ethnic people, disabled people, older people, people belonging to different religions, and people of different sexual orientations are using our services and equally importantly if they are not.

Equality monitoring in employment enables us to ensure that our workforce reflects the diversity of Cheshire East and highlights areas for improvement when it does not. In relation to procurement equality monitoring enables us to ensure that contracts are delivered in a way that promotes opportunity for all providers.

By collecting monitoring information the Council is able to provide evidence that we are reaching the people that need our services. This will enable us to set realistic targets based on factual data, for example, how we are going to tackle under-representation and inequalities through service and/or equality action plans.

We will publish information as required by the Equalities Act 2010.

## **Complaints**

The Council takes all complaints seriously. If anyone feels that the Council has failed to implement the Equality Policy in the service they receive, a complaints procedure is available and can be obtained by contacting the Council. A complaint can be made in a number of ways.

- Visit our website [www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/customerfeedback](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/customerfeedback)
- Call us on 0300 123 5038
- Email us at [letusknow@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:letusknow@cheshireeast.gov.uk)
- Complete the 'Let Us Know' form
- Write to us at: Let us Know, Customer Relations Team, Cheshire East Council, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ
- Call and see us at any of our Customer Service Centres
- Fax us on 01625 504191

## **Joint Strategic Needs Assessment JSNA**

Cheshire East's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is a shared statement on the health and social care needs of people living in Cheshire East, which is required under legislation and is to be used to develop and improve services.

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment pulls together a range of needs assessment, and qualitative and quantitative data within a more joined up framework for commissioners to utilise, to develop and improve services. It is also a source of



information to enable the local community and voluntary sector to find out more about health and social care.

## **Conclusion**

Cheshire East Council aspires to become an inclusive council and put the principles of equality and inclusion into practice, by taking steps to:

- Identify gaps in data collection.
- Establish the purpose and aims of our policies, services or functions.
- Consider any information, data or research that is already available in relation to equalities and what this tells us.
- Make an assessment of the impact or effects on different Communities
- Consider whether there is anything which could be done to remove any adverse impact or effects, or to further promote equality, social inclusion or community cohesion
- Consult those affected and their support framework , for their views and ideas
- Identify any change and/or decide whether to proceed with any new policy, procedures, proposals, or changes to services
- Decide how to best monitor and review policies, services and functions and put forward proposals for any changes
- Formulate an Action Plan to address inequalities, remedy data gaps, improve service delivery, and delivery of our equality objectives
- Publish relevant equalities information on the Council's website.

## **Impact Assessment**

This policy has been reviewed in accordance with Equalities Legislation.

## **Review and Assessment**

This Equality Policy may be amended by Cheshire East Council at any time in order to take into account of changes in legislation and best practice.

Advice and guidance on the operation of this policy is available. For further information and advice on the implementation of the policy, or if this publication is required in an alternative format (for example, large type or electronically) please contact the Partnerships & Performance Team tel: 01270 686633 or email: [equalityandinclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:equalityandinclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk)