
Equality and Diversity Policy - No Matter Who

Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council's (RMBC) vision for equality and diversity is of the Council

- representing, serving and employing people as equals,
- valuing the diversity of their contributions and aspirations,
- no matter who they are or what their circumstances.

We believe that tackling inequalities provides a strong foundation for cohesive and confident communities. We believe that all citizens have a right to equal access to life opportunities, including representation, services and employment by the Council. To achieve this we are working towards removing barriers to opportunities and to narrowing the gap between the most disadvantaged and others.

Some people may suffer from inequality due to discrimination because of their age, health, ethnic origin, religion, gender, sexuality or because they have a disability. We value the diversity of people within the Borough and are committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equality opportunities, eliminating harassment and promoting positive attitudes towards potentially vulnerable groups. Our public statements, services and employment practices will reflect this commitment.

We will promote this policy and expect respect for it from citizens, users of Council services, partner agencies, Councillors, Council employees and our contractors.

Context

The need and aspirations of people in the Borough set the context for this policy. But the Government and other organisations also influence our pursuit of objectives and our choice of solutions.

Rochdale Borough Local Strategic Partnership has developed a vision and aims for the Borough in consultation with local people and organisations. Its vision for the Borough in 2021 is of:

- A thriving place where people want to live, work, visit and do business, a place in which we can all take pride.

Two of the Partnership's twelve aims that flesh out this vision are particularly relevant to No Matter Who: They propose that by 2021 the Borough will be a place where:

- We celebrate our ethnic and cultural diversity, and have good race relations and positive links with other parts of the world. We will respect and maintain our heritage.

- Local people are active citizens and shape their future. We are seen as a national model for partnerships between local people and organisations.

The Council's own Statement of Purpose reflects these priorities. The Council exists to:

- Create the best possible quality of life for all local people;
- Support local people by speaking up for their interests;
- Always keep the things that matter most to local people as our priorities;
- Provide services that create high public satisfaction locally
- Rank as a high performing council nationally

Our corporate strategic plan Aiming High shows what we will do to achieve these purposes. It includes several projects that relate directly to No Matter Who, for instance:

- Increasing how well the composition of the Council reflects the borough's population
- Celebrating ethnic diversity and promote community cohesion
- Implementing the Inclusive Workforce Strategy
- Promoting "Excellence for Everyone" in education

Our Single Equality Scheme brings together our Race, Gender and Disability Equality Schemes. The aim of having a Single Equality Scheme is to minimize duplication and to provide a coherent approach to tackling Equality and Diversity across all the various strands. It aims to make Equality and Diversity central to the way Rochdale Council works in order to create:

- Better informed decision-making and policy development
- A clearer understanding of the needs of service users
- Better quality services which meet varied needs
- More effective targeting of policy and resources
- Better results and greater confidence in public services
- A more effective use of talent in the workforce

The following legislation influences our policy:

- Equal Pay Act 1970 (as amended)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended)
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005
- The Equality Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2006- Sexual Orientation
- The Equality Act 2006- Religion or Belief
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Employment Equality Regulations (Religion or Belief) 2003
- The Employment Equality Regulations (Sexual Orientation) 2003
- The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

- The European Equality Regulations (Sexual Orientation and Religion or Belief) 2003.

We are committed to meeting our obligations under these laws, but we regard them as minimum requirements. Our policy goes beyond them to include some groups of people whom the law does not currently protect, such as older and younger people, bisexual people, lesbians and gay men. We will update our policy as and when necessary to meet new legislation and to follow codes of practice. In this context we welcome the repeal of Section 28 of the local Government Act 1988, which has been a barrier placing unnecessary restrictions on the Council's ability to work with lesbian and gay men.

How we will monitor and review the policy

Our policy has a built-in evaluation system. We will review No Matter Who regularly to ensure that we are still delivering our desired outcomes and learning from evaluation.

We adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government as the framework to progress our work on equality and diversity. The Standard has provided a way to continuously improve our performance on equality and diversity issues. It provides a system for evidence based policy making. The Standard has 5 levels and in line with that Standard, we developed a comprehensive equality plan which provided details on how we would progress through these levels. In 2008 we achieved level 4 of the Standard.

We will achieve our objectives in equality and diversity at corporate and service levels. We will monitor local communities and our workforce as well as our services. We will use national and locally developed performance indicators as part of our audit and scrutiny of our progress in increasing equality and diversity in the Borough.

We require every Councillor and member of staff to recognise and carry out their own responsibility to contribute to the success of this policy. We have earmarked money and staff times to improve our performance on equalities and diversity.

Councillors take the lead in promoting equality and diversity, ensuring that these issues are given due consideration in Council policy, and in the monitoring of the services provided by the Council.

Executive Directors of the Council actively support and assist the equalities work by overseeing the strategic implementation of equalities and diversity. A named Executive Director will act as the champion for leading this work within the organisation.

Service Managers supported by staff have an essential role in delivering this policy by:

- Actively developing their services' approach to equality and diversity;
- Ensuring that staff are adequately trained to meet the requirements of this policy;
- Establishing and maintaining appropriate consultation with community and key stakeholder groups.

How we will consult

We are committed to taking account of how our policy affects different groups through consultation. This safeguards fairness, and helps us to understand how the policy works from the point of view of constituents, customers and employees. We will involve a range of stakeholders, from within the Council as well as from outside. We will consult them during the following stages of the policy process:

- Development
- Implementation
- Monitoring
- Review and revision.

We will use different methods of consultation to reach different groups of people. We will adopt a flexible approach to meet various and changing needs.

The role of the Council in increasing equality and diversity

The Council's many functions fit into three main roles of representing, serving and employing people.

Representing people

In representing local people's interests, we will seek to promote equality and diversity. We will:

- Equip Councillors with the skills and support to engage in and represent the different sections of the community
- Use our influence in partnerships and with partner agencies
- Continue to improve our approach to community consultation so that we achieve results that reflect local people's priorities.

Serving people

The Council is committed to providing high quality services through understanding and meeting individual customer needs and aspirations. We know that these differ from customer to customer, so we will adjust our services accordingly to ensure that they all have a fair and open chance to use and benefit from our services.

So, our commitment means understanding and meeting the needs of customers regardless of race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, cultural background, sex, sexuality, disability, domestic circumstances, illness (such as HIV or AIDS status), age, membership of trade unions or political beliefs.

We deliver a wide range of services directly to customers and through contracts with other organisations. We will improve their contribution to equality and diversity by:

- Linking policies and service delivery
- Giving a clear account of our performance through service monitoring

Employing people

The Council wants the ethnic composition of its workforce to reflect that of the local population, so that it represents and serves the population better. The Council also recognises that people from ethnic minorities face particular disadvantage in employment.

The Council's workforce of 11,000 people, including casual and supply workers, makes it the largest employer in the Borough. These people are our largest resource in improving equality and diversity so we want to ensure that they understand its importance and have the confidence and capacity to do so. This includes:

- Developing a workforce profile reflects that community profile;
- Giving staff the knowledge and confidence to tackle equality and diversity issues.

Trade union activities

The council employs about of 8,000 people not including teachers. In 2009, 2819 people were registered as paying trade union subscriptions through the council's payroll system, again not including members of teachers' associations and craft trade unions.

We will not discriminate against anyone because of his or her trade union activities or membership. We encourage our employees to join relevant trade unions, but recognise that this is a personal choice, which cannot be a basis for any form of discrimination.

Tackling discrimination

It is our policy not to discriminate unlawfully or unfairly against anybody. Sometimes we have to discriminate between people, for instance in selecting candidates for jobs or deciding on people's eligibility for services. In these cases, it is our policy to discriminate lawfully and fairly, only taking into account relevant factors, and explaining our decisions on that basis.

We do know, however, that unlawful and unfair discrimination is common in society. It is based on stereotypes and false assumptions, and the belief that some groups of people have more or fewer rights than others. We oppose unfair discrimination as an abuse of advantage and power.

We also know that institutions as well as individuals can unlawfully and unfairly discriminate. We define institutional discrimination as:

- The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of who they are;
- Processes, attitudes and behaviour, which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping;
- Not just actions taken by a person or organisation, but also actions not taken, neglect, or services provided which do not meet the needs of members of different social groups.

Institutional discrimination can be unwitting, and it can exist no matter how good the intentions of the individual or the organisation. This is a challenge which all organisations, including ourselves, need to face honestly and openly. We will examine our policies and practices and their outcomes to guard against disadvantaging any section of local communities.

What we will do

Disability

Disabled people form approximately 19% of the working age population of the Borough. It is estimated that some 53% of disabled people of working age are unemployed.

(Rochdale Borough Joint Investment Plan Welfare to Work for Disabled People; Rochdale Borough Profile, 2008.)

The percentage of people permanently sick or disabled was 8.3% (11,982), higher than the England and Wales average of 5.5%.

(Census 2001, Rochdale Borough Profile)

We recognise that approaches to disability issues which adopt the medical model (which places responsibility for the disadvantage experienced by disabled people on their impairment) are unhelpful and unlikely to result in actions which effectively deal with or remove the disadvantage.

In line with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and disabled people's organisations, we take the view that our actions will be based on the Social Model of Disability; it is not a person's impairment or medical condition which is the cause of disadvantage but attitudinal and environmental barriers. This means that we consider that disability is the effect of the barriers in

organisation which do not take appropriate account of people who have impairments or long term health conditions.

We have undertaken the development and production of a disability equality action plan as part of the Single Equality Scheme. We will:

- Involve disabled people in the identification of priorities and the development and review of actions
- Gather information about our services, policies and strategies and assess their impact on disabled people
- Develop and monitor an action plan to promote equality of opportunity and reduce discrimination for disabled people
- Undertake actions which will promote equality of opportunity, reduce discrimination for disabled people in line with our specific and general duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. This includes elimination of harassment, promotion of equal opportunities, promoting positive attitudes and encouraging the participation of disabled people in public life.

Race

The latest experimental statistics provided by National Statistics Authority (2006) revealed that there are 178,600 white people in Rochdale Borough (86.5% of the population), 84% of these are identified as being White British (178,600). The largest ethnic minority group were Pakistani with 8.2% of the population (16,900), and the second largest is Bangladeshi with 1.5% of the population (3,100).

We recognise racism as any unfair discrimination on the grounds of people's skin colour, accent, religious beliefs, dress, culture or ethnic origin. We are determined to challenge racism and to create an environment that is free from discrimination.

We know that racism is widespread within society. And we know that we must confront it to reduce its damaging effects on everybody in the Borough. Racist assumptions create the barriers which can hinder appropriate democratic representation, services and employment opportunities.

We also recognise that the seriousness and effects of racial incidents demand swift but sensitive responses. We have adopted the Lawrence Inquiry definition that:

“A racist incident is any incident perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.”

We will:

- Implement our Race Equality Scheme, integrated in our Single Equality Scheme;

- Ensure equality of opportunity for members of the white majority ethnic communities and minority ethnic communities, including (as far as the law permits) gypsies, travellers, refugees and asylum seekers;
- Ensure equality of opportunity for all employees from minority ethnic communities and from majority ethnic communities;
- Identify, challenge and act on racist attitudes, remarks and behaviour.

Gender

Our aim is to promote equality of opportunity between men and women and eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment. We have developed a Gender Equality Scheme that is contained within our Single Equality Scheme and which contains detailed actions that we will take to do this. We recognise that the transgender community may experience discrimination and harassment. To address this our Gender Equality Scheme includes specific actions aimed at eliminating this.

We will:

- Ensure that our services do not discriminate against service users or people who come into contact with the Council because of their gender.
- Ensure fair promotion and development opportunities
- Create positive attitudes towards the transgender workforce and community
- Tackle issues relating to imbalances in employment in services around non-traditional roles for men and women
- Ensure involvement of people in the Council's decision-making systems and procedures regardless of their gender.

Women

There are more females than males in the Borough; with approximately 105,652 (51.4%) women compared with 99,705 (48.6%) males. 9,400 people (6.5%) the same as the national average look after home or family in 2001, of which 8547 are women. This is from the Census 2001, Rochdale Borough Profile).

We recognise that sexism is deep-rooted within society, and that it often undermines women's significant contributions. They are a large and diverse group of people who may experience various forms of discrimination.

Women are still expected to take the major responsibility for the family. Most work in low paid and low status jobs. They are under-represented in the organisations that take major decisions affecting people's lives. Many face

domestic violence in the form of physical, emotional, economic and sexual abuse in the family, as well as violence in public.

We will:

- Challenge discriminatory assumptions about women;
- Take positive action to redress the effects of past discrimination against women;
- Offer equal access for women to representation, services and employment and encourage other organisations to do the same.

Caring responsibility

21,988 people provide unpaid care, helping family, friends or neighbours with long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability or problems relating to old age. 4,802 of these people, 2.3% of the total population, provide unpaid care for 50 hours a week or more.

(Census 2001, Rochdale Borough Profile).

We recognise that people with caring responsibilities for others may face discrimination. We will:

- Adopt flexible employment practices;
- Provide maternity, paternity, partner or support leave for birth, adoptive and foster parents.

Sexuality

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles 2000 estimates that there are between 1.3 million to 1.9 million lesbian, gay and bisexual people in employment.

In 2001, 204 people were living in a same sex couple, out of 156,216 people aged over 16 living in households (a total of 0.13%).

(Census 2001, Rochdale Borough Profile)

We recognise that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals may face discrimination and hostility through intolerance and ignorance. As a result, they may experience harassment, and some live in fear of being "outed". We welcome the repeal of Section 28 of Local Government Act 1988, which has been a barrier placing unnecessary restrictions on the Council's ability to work with lesbian and gay me. We will:

- Consult with lesbians, gay men and bisexuals within our workforce and the wider community, in appropriate ways.

- Ensure that our services take account of the needs of lesbians and gay men;
- Promote positive images of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Age

The ageing population is one of the major structural changes facing the UK over the next two or three decades.

77,832 (38%) of the people in the Borough are aged 45 years old and over.

(Census 2001, Rochdale Profile)

Since 2001 the number of older people (females over 60 and males over 65) has risen from 16.5% to 17.1% in 2007. By 2031 there is projected to be a 39% increase in older people in the Borough compared to 2008.

(Source: ONS, 2007)

We recognise that people are discriminated against because of their age. We will:

- Ensure that people of all ages are treated with respect and dignity;
- Challenge discriminatory assumptions about younger and older people.

HIV or AIDS

It was estimated that 118 people living within Rochdale Borough were accessing treatment or care for HIV. 34 people in the borough were categorised as having an AIDS defining illness. This is the presence of one or more of a specific type of infection or cancer in someone with HIV. The figure outlines the number of people who have ever had one of these illnesses over the time that they have been HIV positive.

(HIV & AIDS in the North West of England Mid Year 2008-HIV/AIDS Monitoring Unit, Centre for Public Health)

We recognise that people face discrimination due to being HIV positive or having AIDS. We will:

- Ensure that services meet the specific needs of people living with HIV or AIDS;
- Support people who are HIV positive or have AIDS;
- Challenge false information about the nature of HIV or AIDS.

Religion or belief

Christians form the main religious group in Rochdale with 148,059 (72% of the total population) people. The next largest religious group was Muslims with

19,248 (9.4%) people in the Borough. 1 in 10 people in the borough described themselves as having no religion.

(Census 2001, Rochdale Borough Profile)

We will not discriminate against anyone because of his or her religion or belief, which is any religion, religious belief, or similar philosophical belief.

We will respect and accommodate people's religious observances in both serving and employing them, and we will expect others to do the same.

We realise that at times some people's beliefs may conflict with other aspects of this policy. We will try to resolve any such conflicts, but we will treat the aims of this policy as overriding and expect others to comply with it.

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