

### South Cambridgeshire District Council Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2007-2010 (2nd Draft)

#### 1. Introduction

South Cambridgeshire District Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, good community relations and to tackling all forms of discrimination. As an organisation, the Council has a responsibility and a community leadership role to promote and implement equality when it is:

- providing services
- purchasing services
- employing staff
- working in partnership with other organisations

The Council recognises that people may experience discrimination and be disadvantaged for many reasons, including but not limited to:-

- race or ethnic origin
- religion or belief
- disability
- age
- gender
- sexual orientation

We recognise that our record in promoting equality and diversity is not strong. We recognise also the changing and more diverse nature of the district. We have a lot to do to improve equalities awareness and practice within the Council and to demonstrate the progress we are making in order to give a lead to others.

This Comprehensive Equalities Policy forms the basis of our commitment to equality in service provision, employment and community leadership. It sets out how the Council will embrace equality of opportunity and diversity in the services it provides and promote and community cohesion within the district. It provides a focus on achieving consistent improvement against the requirements of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

#### 2. Our Corporate Objectives & Values

Our Corporate Objectives from 2008/09 onwards are:-

- **To work in partnership to manage growth to benefit everyone in South Cambridgeshire now and in the future.** In delivering this objective, we will work to ensure that new development meets the needs of an increasingly diverse community and to foster strong, diverse, sustainable new communities.
- **To deliver high quality services that represent best value and are accessible to all our community.** In delivering this objective we will ensure that the services we provide meet the needs of all users and that in our role as employer and provider of services we meet our

statutory obligations and promote equality and diversity. We have set a specific objective to work towards level 2 of the national equality standard for local government.

- **To enhance quality of life and build a sustainable South Cambridgeshire where everyone is proud to live and work.** In delivering this objective we will listen to and engage with all sections of the community. We will work with local people to promote community cohesion and address the needs of the most vulnerable in the community.

We have adopted the following Corporate Values:-

- **Mutual Respect**
- **Trust**
- **A commitment to service improvement**
- **Customer service**
- **Professionalism**

In embedding these values within the organisation we will place emphasis on aspects which will support our commitment to equality and diversity:-

- Valuing people from all backgrounds (Mutual Respect)
- Developing effective working relations and openness within the council and with service users and partners (Trust)
- Meeting the needs of all service users (Service Improvement and Customer Service)
- Meeting statutory requirements and demonstrating good standards of conduct (Professionalism)

### **3. Our Commitment to Equality**

South Cambridgeshire District Council values people from all backgrounds and supports their right to respect and equality of opportunity.

We will work to eliminate discrimination and prejudice from all we do and ensure that equalities becomes a central and essential element of our service planning and delivery, both as an employer and provider of services.

We will use our position as democratically elected community leader to promote equality of opportunity and diversity within our partners and the wider community.

Our commitment to the development and implementation of a corporate equality policy is reflected in our adoption of the following principles:

#### *Fairness and equity*

- Being fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory in all areas and activities, including service delivery, staff recruitment and development; the purchasing of goods and services
- Ensuring that the most disadvantaged and vulnerable sections of our community have equal access to all of our services

### *Compliance with our statutory obligations*

- Ensuring that we operate in conformity with existing equalities legislation, codes of practice and other such legislation as may be introduced in future
- Improving our equalities practice at corporate, departmental, service and individual levels throughout the Council to maintain a positive and inclusive workforce culture

### *Promotion of community cohesion & good community relations*

- Ensuring that elected members and staff at all levels are clear about their responsibility to challenge discrimination, promote diversity and social inclusion, and work towards equality for all members of the community.
- Actively promoting a culture of recognition and valuing of diversity

### *Community involvement/inclusion*

- Encouraging real participation in local democracy and representation from people who may normally feel excluded from decision making processes

### *Partnership working*

- Working with partners in the statutory, voluntary, and private sectors to promote 'best practice' equality approaches throughout the community strategy, while ensuring the best outcomes for the people of South Cambridgeshire.

## **4. Our Statutory Obligations**

We will work to promote the requirements and principles embodied in the existing framework of legislation and codes of practice, which includes:-

- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (updated 1986)
- The Equal Pay Act 1970
- The Race Relations Act 1976, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- The Disability Discrimination Acts 1995, 2005
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Gender Recognition Act 2004
- The Civil Partnerships Act 2005
- The Equality Act 2006

Much of the key equalities legislation in the UK has, in the past, focused on the avoidance of discrimination. Over the last few years several new pieces of legislation have been introduced which place a new '*positive duty*' on local authorities which goes beyond avoiding discrimination and harassment into actively promoting equality of opportunity and good community relations.

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 introduced the 'positive' duty to promote race equality, with the aim of making race equality central to the way public authorities work, by

putting it at the centre of policy making, service delivery, and employment practice.

Similarly, a disability equality duty became applicable to local authorities in December 2006. The Equality Act of 2006 amended the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to introduce (April 2007) a gender equality duty.

Broadly speaking, the legislation requires us to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Eliminate harassment
- Promote equality of opportunity,
- Promote good relations between different sections of the community

In all cases, the general duty is supported by specific duties which are not ends in themselves but the steps, methods or arrangements that will be used to meet the obligations under the general duty. As an authority we must develop mechanisms laying out our arrangements for:

- collecting information on the impact of policies & practices on the relevant populations (gender, race, disability, sexuality)
- assessing, and consulting on, the impact of proposed policies on the relevant populations
- implementing our race, disability and gender equality schemes through an action plan
- monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of the action plan
- training staff on their duties in relation to the schemes.

In implementing these requirements, we will seek, more broadly, to take into account individual differences among all our customers and employees. This is in keeping with the growing emphasis in the UK on human rights issues and the need to treat all individuals – regardless of their background(s) as worthy of respect and dignity as both customers, staff members, councillors and other stakeholders in the local democratic process

## **5. Our Framework for Improving Performance on Equalities**

We have adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government as the framework to help us meet our equalities objectives.

The Equality Standard was developed by the Local Government Employers Organisation, in collaboration with the commissions for racial equality, disability rights and equal opportunities, all of which are shortly to be merged into the Human Rights and Equalities Commission.

The Standard is framed to help local authorities comply with their statutory duties but, at the same time to go beyond a merely “legislative” approach, by ensuring that all sections of the community have a genuine voice in shaping equality improvement plans.

The Standard has five levels of achievement. At each level the themes of community leadership, employment practices, service delivery and the purchasing of goods & services are emphasised.

**Level 1:** requires us to show a commitment by to developing and implementing a comprehensive equality policy

**Level 2:** involves engagement with stakeholders in reviewing and assessing our current equalities performance in each part of the organisation

**Level 3:** requires us to set objectives and targets for improving our performance (equalities

action plans)

**Level 4:** entails data management and monitoring arrangements being in place to measure the progress of our action plans

**Level 5:** High and consistent level of improvement

This Policy and other measures we are currently taking will enable us to achieve Level 1 of the Standard. We are also committed to working towards achieving Level 2.

## **6. Our Equality Aims and Objectives**

In order to deliver our commitments to equality and our statutory obligations the Council has adopted the following aims and objectives:-

### **Community Leadership and Equalities Policy**

The Council will -

- a) Encourage and support residents from all backgrounds to be engaged in and active in local democracy and community life, particularly resident groups which have been less represented in the past.
- b) Respect and celebrate, through participation in relevant events for example, the variety of identities, lifestyles, cultures and religions within the district
- c) Listen and respond to the views of all sections of the community through appropriate and widespread consultation, involvement events and other forms of participation. In doing this, we will ensure that we seek the views of groups who are particularly vulnerable or at risk of social exclusion or have found it difficult to access our services or receive favourable outcomes from them. These groups will include, but not be confined to, the following –
  - Disabled people (and, in some cases, their carers) with physical, sensory and/or cognitive impairments
  - Minority ethnic communities (including new arrivals and gypsy/traveller communities)
  - Certain gender defined groups (e.g. women or men on low incomes, and the trans-gendered community)
  - Groups discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual)
  - Communities discriminated against on the grounds of faith or belief
  - Groups disadvantaged as a result of age discrimination (younger and older people)
  - People living in isolated rural communities

We will also recognise that many people fall into more than one target group.

- d) Promote the value of community cohesion and social inclusion in all aspects of the council's work
- e) Help ensure that all residents feel safe within their communities
- f) Seek to influence our partners to adopt 'best practice' approaches to equalities promotion, and implement equalities related voluntary and community sector codes of good practice (e.g. the "Compact").

## **Employment Equality Policy**

The Council will –

- a) Work towards a workforce which reflects the working-age population of the district and the county and conforms with BVPI guidelines on staff diversity
- b) Ensure that our recruitment and selection processes are non-discriminatory and encourage applications from all sections of the community
- c) Enable all our staff to have fair and equal access to relevant learning and development opportunities, and to the information they need to do their jobs
- d) Ensure that grievance and disciplinary procedures are free from bias against any group of employees
- e) Provide a safe and accessible working environment that values and respects the identity and background of each staff member
- f) Promote a working environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying
- g) Ensure effective communication with, and involvement of, all staff the future development of the organisation
- h) Establish and maintain a job evaluation framework which ensures equal pay for equal work
- i) Regularly conduct a local labour market assessment

## **Customer Service Equality Policy**

The Council will –

- a) Demonstrate commitment to equality and diversity through community-focus, engaging with & involving communities in the design & delivery of appropriate service and revising service plans, as and where necessary to address any adverse impacts of our policy on particular groups of customer (e.g. older people, ethnic minorities)
- b) Ensure our buildings are as accessible to disabled customers by making reasonable adjustments as and when required
- c) Ensure that all of our services are fully accessible to customers regardless of physical or cultural barriers or where they live.
- d) Make special or separate service provision arrangements where appropriate (e.g. for the reasons of safety or specialist requirements) for “at risk” or vulnerable customers
- e) Provide clear, meaningful information about council services in ways that are accessible to all sections of the community, particularly vulnerable and/or disadvantaged sections
- f) Monitor the take-up of services, complaints about the service and/or the satisfaction levels

with services to ensure they do not discriminate against or exclude sections of the community.

## **7. Links with the Sustainable Community Strategy**

The Council's Corporate Objectives and the Sustainable Community Strategy for the district have been developed together from the same evidence base and consultation and have strong linkages between them. The Council will work with its partners on the Local Strategic Partnership and the county-wide Local Area Agreement to pursue the objectives in this policy.

## **8. The Actions We Will Be Taking To Implement Our Policy**

We will take the following high level actions to deliver our equality commitments, aims and objectives -

- a) Achieve Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by December 2007
- b) Review and develop our existing equality schemes – including development of a gender equality scheme. In keeping with our statutory obligations, we currently have a *Race Equality Scheme*, a *Disability Equality Scheme* and are working towards the establishment of a *Gender Equality Scheme*.
- c) Establish a corporate “self assessment” mechanism for reviewing progress across the organisation as a whole
- d) Establish a member development programme which includes a focus on equality and diversity.
- e) Establish a training programme for all staff on our statutory responsibilities in reference to equalities legislation and the Council commitments in this policy.
- f) Develop a Human Resources Diversity Action Plan
- g) Introduce a campaign of promoting positive images of disabled people and other of our equalities target groups in the key communications vehicles of the council and of highlighting good equalities practice in the organisation
- h) Strengthen our links with partners and with the LAA process to ensure that a ‘golden thread’ links higher level equality objectives at the county level with equality improvement action plans at the service planning level.
- i) Achieve Level 2 of the Equality Standard.

## **9. Monitoring Progress**

The council monitors and reviews its policies and practices regularly to ensure that the principles, objectives and priorities set out in the policy are achieved.

We will review the Equality Policy at least every three years and up-date it as necessary to make sure that we are continuously improving service delivery and customer care. This will be done through existing planning and performance systems.

The Equalities Steering Group, in particular, will play a lead role in overseeing the corporate self assessment process, as detailed in the Equality Standard, and will be responsible for overall quality control of assessment and action planning within the various departments

**More information:**

If you'd like more information about our Equal Opportunities Policy or if you would like a copy of this document in a different format or language, please contact:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Website: [www.scambs.gov.uk](http://www.scambs.gov.uk)

To be added: **Appendix 1**, giving a profile of equality groups in the district.