**PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST**

**EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

**POLICY STATEMENT**

**Introduction**

The Royal Borough of Kingston has a very diverse population. According to the 20011 Census 26% of Kingston’s population is from Black and minority ethnic groups; this rises to 33% for those under nineteen. However, the GLA estimate of Kingston’s BME population in 2026 is 33% and the proportion in our schools to be 41%. This is higher than the national average. Population projections indicate a gradual rise in numbers of all ethnic minority groups between 2011-2026. A significant increase in the population of ‘Other’ ethnic groups is forecast with a rise from 3.18% of the total population to 10.25%. Kingston has the largest Korean population in Western Europe; recent estimates put this as high as 8-10,000.

Kingston Interpreting Service providers a valuable service to enable individual to access services due to their disability or if English is not their first language. The majority population are Christian (52.9%), 5.9% are Muslim, 4.7% Hindu, 1.1% Buddhist, 0.8% Sikh and no religion, 25.7%. Approximately 12% of people in the Borough are disabled.

Diversity embodies all the differences that make us unique individuals. In Kingston we recognize that diversity is not only a reality, it’s a distinct advantage, and one that we value and embrace. Just as the people of Kingston are infinitely diverse, so is our workforce. Our understanding of diversity helps us serve our community better.

Success and productivity are natural extensions of a corporate culture that truly values all people, putting an appreciation of diversity among our top corporate priorities.

Our commitment to equality in our service delivery and employment practices means that we believe in:

* Providing fairness and equality of opportunity
* Recognising that everyone is different and that these differences must be equally respected and valued
* Challenging discrimination so that we demonstrate our commitments to equality and do not exclude people or make them feel isolated
* Respecting people’s difference in viewpoint and ensuring that everyone can raise their point of view

**What does the Policy Statement cover?**

The Policy Statement covers residents, visitors, service users, elected members, employees and potential employees. The Council has taken account of socio economic disadvantage that contributes towards inequalities of outcome within this policy.

Education establishments have their own policies and procedures determined by their governors, which means that they are not covered by this policy. This policy statement is recommended as a model of good practice and where a policy of this nature does not exist this one may be adopted or customised to meet specific needs.

The Policy Statement covers all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination beyond the Equality Act including those on the grounds of: age, asylum or refugee status, carers, class, colour, disability (including physical, sensory impairment, mental health, learning disability or HIV status), race, ethnicity or national origin (including Travellers), gender, gender reassignment, language spoken, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, part-time working, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or trade union membership.

As a Council we have adopted the ‘social model’ of disability as opposed to the ‘medical model’. The key difference between the two is in the ‘location’ of the problem. According to the medical model, disabled people are unable to participate in society as a direct result of their impairment. However, according to the social model, people with impairments are disabled by physical, social, cultural and corporate barriers. Disabled people generally have the same needs and aspirations as non-disabled people, expecting to be able to access services independently. It is society and the environment that disables people with impairments. Thus disabled people are not ‘people with disabilities’; they are ‘disabled people’, disabled by society and the built environment.

The Council recognises that it has a key role to play in promoting community cohesion, tackling the disadvantage caused by socio economic factors and fostering good relations and understanding between all people. The Council also accepts that there are strong links between equality, diversity and community cohesion. Community cohesion can only grow when everyone feels they are being treated fairly, with respect and appreciation and having access to services, employment and life chances in general. In pursuing this aim, the Council will work and support initiatives to promote positive images and attitudes towards all sections of the population by tackling prejudices and ignorance, breaking down barriers between people and by providing greater opportunities for social interaction.

The policy statement applies to all aspects of the Council’s functions including:

* Service provision
* Commissioning and procurement of goods and services
* Recruitment, employment, training and staff development
* Community engagement including consultation with local people
* Grant making
* Partnerships with other organisations
* Promotion and publicity
* Exercising of our statutory powers and responsibilities

The Policy Statement applies at all levels in the Council and implementation is the responsibility of every Council employee.

**Policy Statement aim**

Our overall aim is to ensure that everyone including our staff can fully participate in the social, cultural, political or economic life of the Borough. To this end we aim to:

* Eliminate unlawful discrimination in all forms
* Advance equality of opportunity and improve access to services (by removing the barriers which deny access to our services)
* Foster good relations between everyone and encourage community cohesion
* Reduce inequalities resulting from socio economic disadvantage
* Celebrate and value diversity

**Our commitments**

* Policy and planning: we will promote equality and value diversity in all our policies and service planning.
* Service delivery and customer care: we will ensure that our services are relevant to the diverse needs of our residents and local communities, are accessible to all and are delivered in a way that is appropriate and sensitive.
* Community engagement and development: we will encourage community participation to ensure that we listen to and invest in the needs of our residents and communities.
* Information: we will ensure that information about our services is offered in appropriate formats and languages and appears in media read or heard by local people.
* Protection from violence and harassment: we will continue to work with our partners to ensure that domestic violence, racist and religious hate crime, homophobic crime, adult abuse and abuse of disabled people is tackled.
* Commissioning and procurement: we will ensure that equality issues are part of the commissioning and procurement process.
* Partnerships: we will ensure that our partners share and engage in our commitments
* Employment: we will aim to have a workforce that is representative of the community we serve. To this end we will ensure that our workforce is built on open and fair employment practices, that our staff are valued and that the work environment is inclusive.

**How we will Achieve our Commitments**

**A plan of action:**

The Council’s Single Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy outline the way in which we plan to implement our policy statement and includes an annual action plan for implementation. Points below summarize the Council’s main actions.

**Measuring success:**

The Council will use the principles of the Equality Framework for Local Government as a guide for continuous improvement in the work of equality. The Framework covers race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age and will be extended to cover the protected characteristics.

**Structures for implementation:**

The Council has an Equalities Strategy that provides an overarching framework that sets out our approach to delivering equalities.

To ensure that equalities is embedded across the organisation, with robust monitoring and accountability, we have an **Equalities Forum** - chaired by the Chief Executive with representatives from directorates and the voluntary sector and the Union. The Forum provides scrutiny of the equality implications of significant policy or service changes in the Borough.

We also have an Equalities Board. Its purpose is to steer and scrutinise equalities work across the Council and to oversee progress against the Equality Actions in Equality and Community Cohesion Strategy.

There are also equality groups operating throughout the Council who are responsible for co-ordinating equality at a Directorate level.

**Consulting with residents and staff:**

The Council has set up the following consultative forums to help in implementing this Policy:

* A Black and Ethnic Minorities Forum which acts to inform, challenge, check and support the Council’s equality initiatives in order to improve its commitment and effectiveness in carrying out its functions.
* Youth Parliament
* Learning Disability Parliament
* Black and Minority Ethnic Staff Group
* Disabled Staff Group
* Family and Carers Staff Group
* Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Staff Network

**Assessing our policies and services:**

We will continue to monitor existing policies (monitoring service users, identifying gaps in provision and planning change) and assess the impact of new policies to ensure that they do not discriminate. We will put our policies into action based on engagement and consultation, raising awareness and developing outcomes that make a difference.

**Training our staff:**

The Council runs training on equality for staff. Some includes specific training for policy officers and for managers. Mandatory generic equality training is being delivered to all front line staff. The Councils training on equality covers all the equality strands. In addition there is an equality slot on the Induction course that all new staff attend. Equality is included in the induction programme for councillors.

**Dealing with complaints:**

Complaints about any service provided by the Council should be made to nominated people in each directorate. A leaflet ‘Have Your Say’ is available online and in reception areas with names of those who can be contacted. The Council has a Code of Conduct in relation to staff and breaches of this code are investigated in accordance with the Council’s disciplinary procedure.

**Who is responsible for equality and implementing this Policy Statement?**

The Executive portfolio holder for Equalities has overall responsibility for this Policy Statement. The Chief Executive and Directors have the management responsibility for ensuring that the Policy Statement is implemented across the Council. Managers are responsible for delivering equality in their services, providing support for staff to work together to achieve equality, and acting on any staff or community complaints. All employees are responsible for ensuring that they work together to recognise and remove barriers so that they can promote equality, fairness and dignity, and behave in accordance with this Policy Statement.

**Review of this Policy Statement**

This Policy Statement is effective from March 2015 and will be reviewed annually and amended as necessary to reflect changes in legislation, codes of practice or special issues of local concern.

March 2017