



Comprehensive Equalities Policy

Hart's Equality and Diversity Commitment has been designed to integrate with existing initiatives to provide the Council with a consistent and systematic framework through which it can incorporate equality within all stages of its activities. This policy will show that we are committed to recognising the importance of fair treatment and equal access to our services and employment and have been developed as a tool to enable the Council to mainstream gender, race and disability into our policies and practice at all levels. We recognise that to reach equality of outcome and treat everyone fairly, we need to recognise and value difference and diversity.

1 **OUR OBJECTIVES ARE TO:**

- Our long-term aim is to be a responsive authority in every aspect of our service activities; providing appropriate, accessible and effective services and facilities to meet the diverse needs of our community.
- Provide clear information about our services in appropriate formats and languages that meet peoples' needs
- Continue to make physical and reasonable adjustments to our premises and services to ensure that they are accessible
- Review and monitor our services to ensure that all sections of the community are receiving fair access and outcomes
- Continue to work with partner organisations to make Hart a safer place to live work and visit, free from discrimination and harassment
- Respond promptly and fairly to any complaints that we receive about our services, including those of discrimination
- Provide training for employees and members to develop the attitudes and behaviour which support diversity and equality
- Promote excellent customer care recognising the diversity of customers' needs.

2 THE LAW AND OUR COMMITMENT TO COMPLY WITH IT

There are several pieces of legislation that combat discrimination and promote equal opportunities and diversity. These are inclusive of but not limited to:

Equal Pay Act 1970
Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Race Relations Act 1976
Disability Discrimination Act 1995
Employment Rights Act 1996
Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
Employment Act 2002
Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
Religion or Belief Regulations 2003
Sexual Orientation Regulations 2003
(Age Discrimination Regulations to be introduced in 2006)

2.1 Sex Discrimination Act 1975

The council is committed to gender equality in line with the Sex Discrimination Act in providing an environment free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment both in terms of access to the Council's services and in employment. The areas that specifically address this are as follows:

Equal Pay Act 1970

- In accordance with this Act, the Council strives to prevent discrimination between men and women in the terms of their contracts of employment, including pay.

Recruitment and Selection

- All literature describes jobs without any gender bias and does not discriminate on the grounds of gender or marital status. Interviewers are trained to avoid making stereotypical assumptions on gender and jobs.
- It is inappropriate to ask questions at interview which are directed at childcare or family provision unless all candidates are asked this in line with a specific requirement of the job. All questions are directly suited to the purpose of the interview.

Training and Development

- Access to training facilities is fairly provided for all. Any consideration given to career development, training and so on, is based upon the

individual's capabilities and organisational needs and not upon gender. All staff are encouraged and assisted in developing the skills necessary for promotion. The organisation of training courses takes account of the needs of part timers (who are disproportionately female) in fixing the days of the week of training courses.

Flexible Working

- The Council is committed to improving work life balance of all staff and supports them in achieving a balance between the demands of their jobs and personal responsibilities. A range of flexible working options is provided to support this.

Maternity, Paternity and Parental Provisions

The Council is committed to ensuring that those employees who have caring and family responsibilities are not unfairly discriminated against and positively promotes their access to employment opportunities. A supportive framework has been developed through its policies on maternity, paternity, parental, adoptive parents and time off for dependants.

Sexual Harassment

- To experience sexual harassment can be both stressful and embarrassing. The Council believes that everyone has the right to access Council services and to seek, obtain and hold employment without discrimination or harassment. The Council will provide a working environment that is free of sexual harassment and intimidation.

2.2 The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations

- Gender reassignment is a process undertaken under medical supervision for the purpose of reassigning a person's sex by changing physiological or other characteristics of sex. The Sex Discrimination Act was extended in 1999 to make it unlawful to discriminate in employment on the grounds of an employee intending to, undergoing or having undergone, gender reassignment.

2.3 Sexual Orientation

- "Sexual orientation" is defined as being a sexual orientation towards persons of the same sex (this covers gay men and lesbians); the opposite sex (this covers heterosexual men and women); or both sexes (this covers bisexual men and women).
- The Council recognises that individuals can be reticent of revealing their sexual preference and may experience harassment as a consequence. Accordingly, the Council will not tolerate the creation of a hostile environment, which may include offensive remarks or jokes of

the publication/duplication of material, or images, which may cause offence.

2.4 Religion or Belief

- The Council is committed to ensuring that religion or belief will not be used to influence decisions about recruitment, promotion, and access to training, service delivery. Accordingly, the Council will provide an environment free from discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

2.5 Age

- The Council will not discriminate on the basis of age. The EU Employment Directive 2000 establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation and contains anti-age discrimination provisions. Government consultation began in spring 2003 and the directive is scheduled for implementation in December 2006.

2.6 Race

- The Race Relations Act 1976 makes it unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of colour, race, nationality (including citizenship) or ethnic or national origin, or to apply requirements of conditions which have a disproportionately disadvantageous effect on people of a particular racial group, and which cannot be justified on non-racial grounds. It also applies to discriminatory employment advertising and makes it unlawful to apply pressure to discriminate or to aid discrimination by another person.
- The Race Relations Amendment Act 2002 strengthened previous legislation and placed new duties on all public authorities. These new duties are designed to make sure that public authorities positively promote racial equality and that employment and services (including those services that are provided for them through other organisations) are fair and accessible for everyone.

As a consequence of the new duties the Council has produced a Race Equality Policy and a Race Equality Scheme, which is reviewed every three years and includes the Council's commitment to monitoring, consultation, audit and scrutiny. This is carried through by impact assessments of all services.

Racial Harassment

- Racial harassment is unlawful race discrimination; it can be described as "Violence which may be verbal or physical and which includes attacks on property as well as the person, suffered by individuals or

groups because of their race, nationality, ethnic origins, when the victim believes that the perpetrator was acting on racial grounds”.

- The Council believes that everyone has the right to access Council services and to seek, obtain and hold employment without discrimination or harassment. The Council will provide a working environment that is free of racial harassment and intimidation.

2.7 Disability

The Council is committed to provide equal access to its services regardless of disability. Furthermore it has an ongoing programme to enable people to access its services both through physical adjustments to buildings and through access to a range of formats through hearing loops and through Braille or large type options on its documents.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) makes it unlawful to discriminate against a disabled person in any aspect of employment for a reason connected with their disability. It defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day to day activities”.

This means that employers:

- Must not treat a disabled person less favourably because of a reason relating to their disability, without a justifiable reason
- Are required to make reasonable adjustments to working conditions or the work place where that would help to accommodate a particular disabled person

3 RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE POLICY AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

The ultimate responsibility for implementing this policy and achieving change lies with the Chief Executive, Corporate Directors and Heads of Service. However, the responsibility for the policy is the responsibility of all Members and employees who are accountable for their actions and need to follow the principles and standards described below.

Mainstreaming

Include equality and diversity principles as part of the everyday work of the Council

- Develop and implement corporate and service action plans to achieve the aims of this Policy.

- Set relevant targets and performance indicators based on an analysis of consultation and data

Training

- Ensure staff and members have the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the policy
- Ensure that all employees understand what equality means in the context of customer care and service provision and are equipped to put it into practice without prejudice
- Ensure that managers understand the requirements of our employment policies as they related to equalities

Service Delivery

- Commit to equality action planning and equality target setting within all service areas.

Consultation

- Commit to systematic consultation with the diverse community of Hart

Ensure employment policies and practices are fair and equitable

- Ensure that we select applicants for jobs solely on the basis of their relevant experience, qualifications and skills
- Ensure that an individual's age, gender, physical impairment, faith, sexual orientation or ethnic origin is not a barrier to recruitment or career progression
- Promote the recruitment and retention of a more diverse workforce through publicity, improving physical access, workplace support and other reasonable adjustments
- Produce an annual employment report, which compares our workforce profile to that of the district.
- Ensure that the Council applies equal pay

Our Equalities Policy Framework

The Council is committed to equal opportunities in its dealings with community groups, customers and employees. In order to ensure this, the Council is committed to identifying groups within the community

whose needs/requirements are less well met by Council services than those of other groups.

The Comprehensive Equalities Policy (CEP) provides the overall policy framework for our equalities work. A Corporate Equalities Plan will detail how this policy will be implemented.

Equality Standard for Local Government

A key driver for Equality and Diversity at Hart is the Equality Standard for Local Government with its five levels of:

1. Commitment to a comprehensive equality policy
2. Assessment and consultation
3. Setting equality objectives and targets
4. Information systems and monitoring against targets
5. Achieving and reviewing outcomes

4 CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Draw on government guidance and benchmarking with other local authorities to share, adapt and implement best practice
- Review and update targets in the light of local need, experience and new legislation

5 MONITORING PROGRESS

- Use self-assessment, internal audit and the scrutiny process locally using national and local developed performance indicators.
- To monitor progress and revise targets in all areas of action.

The Council will monitor ethnicity, disability, gender and age in the following areas:

- Recruitment and selection procedures, applied to those applying for, shortlisted and selected for positions
- Work force establishment
- Training and development opportunities, including those accepted for training.
- Disciplinary and grievance cases
- Employees leaving the Council and their reasons for doing so
- Complaints and evidence of customer satisfaction
- Take up of services to ensure there is no under or over representation of particular groups

6 **REVIEW OF THE DIVERSITY POLICY**

The policy will be amended as required and will be reviewed annually to ensure that it continues to meet legislative requirements and Council objectives. Consultation with partners and other relevant parties will take place at the time when the policy is reviewed and as required by other equal opportunities legislation and results will be reported locally.

7 **CONCLUSION**

By following this policy the council will ensure that the employment and services it provides are fair and equitable.

The Policy will enforce the commitment to develop equality objectives and targets, to consultation and impact assessment, monitoring, audit and scrutiny.

ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

This document is available in alternative formats – other languages, braille and large print. It is also downloadable from our website on www.hart.gov.uk.