



EQUAL

OPPORTUNITIES

POLICY

**CROYDON
COUNCIL**

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This Policy was adopted by Croydon Council on 31.03.99 and supersedes any previous policy document or statement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Good practice in equalities issues benefits all people. The Council acknowledges that the quality of life for many people has been undermined by discrimination and disadvantage. People's experiences of discrimination are both wide and varied and need to be believed and acted on. People have been and still are discriminated against both in service delivery and employment because of their ethnic origin, gender, disability, age, sexuality or religion. The Council also recognizes that some people suffer discrimination through unemployment, ill health, social exclusion and other socio-economic factors and less obvious reasons. The Council's purpose for this policy is to stop discrimination and improve the quality of life for all. The Council recognizes that this will improve the quality of its workforce and the services they deliver.

2. STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Council will treat all people with dignity and respect, recognizing the value of each individual. The Council is committed to eliminating all forms of discrimination in service delivery and employment on grounds of race, gender, disability, age, sexuality and religion.

3. AIMS

The Council commits itself to providing:

- services that are accessible according to need
- equal and appropriate opportunities in employment and recruitment
- effective partnerships with all sectors of the community

4. PRINCIPLES

The Council aims to achieve these by adhering to the following principles:

- placing good equalities practice at the core of all Council activities
- challenging past and continuing discrimination
- listening and responding to individuals, communities and staff
- fairly allocating appropriate resources and being openly accountable to the community
- ensuring that its commitment is an ongoing process

The policy will be reviewed and monitored yearly to ensure that it meets changing needs.

5. OBJECTIVES

Objectives for accessible services

- Aim to achieve all levels of the Council's Equalities Standard and ensure that services meet Best Value principles.
- Review all Council services from the perspective of the Council's Equality Principles to ensure they meet the differing needs of individuals and groups.
- Provide clear information about Council services in ways that are accessible and meet the communities' needs.
- Work together and consult with all sections of the community on service needs and provision.
- Monitor and evaluate services to ensure that they do not discriminate.
- Ensure equal access to the Council's complaints procedure.

Objectives for equal and appropriate treatment in employment and recruitment opportunities

- Employ a workforce that represents the make up of the borough's population in terms of race, gender and disability.
- Monitor the recruitment and selection process to ensure it is free from discrimination and openly accountable.
- Review and monitor all other personnel policies and procedures to ensure that they do not perpetuate discrimination.
- Ensure that access to information and records is as open and transparent as possible.
- Provide a safe and accessible working environment which values and respects individuals' identities and cultures.
- Ensure a culture and working environment free from discrimination and harassment.
- Develop a culture which encourages networks of staff groups.
- Encourage and help staff to reach their full potential.

Objectives for effective partnership within the community

- Work in partnership with all sections of the community.
- Listen and respond to communities' views through widespread public consultation and participation in a nonjudgmental way within a safe environment.
- Encourage and support people to be active in community life.
- Celebrate and respect the variety of lifestyles and cultures in the borough.
- Work with others to provide an environment free from discrimination, harassment and violence.
- Encourage others to adopt this policy, including those who contract to provide goods and services for the Council.

6. DISCRIMINATION AND SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE

Discrimination can be direct, indirect, intentional or unintentional. Perception of discrimination is more important than intention. Each person is the best judge of their own experience of discrimination and must be taken seriously. Discrimination can be perpetuated by individuals, groups or institutions.

At an individual level discrimination consists of personal attitudes of superiority; for example that white people believe they are superior to black people and that men believe they are superior to women. It can also be behaviour that prejudices a person because of the group with which they may be identified.

At a group level, prejudiced group behaviour reinforces or encourages discrimination.

At an institutional level, prejudices become embedded in policies, practices, procedures and criteria for decision making. These discriminate with the effect of excluding some people in preference to others.

At all levels, prejudice linked to power leads to oppression. Discrimination, through unequal treatment and inequitable distribution of opportunities, power and resources, deprives people of better life experiences.

Equality on the grounds of race

BLACK

There is not one word that embraces all minority ethnic groups. The word 'Black' is often used to describe a life-experience of discrimination of people because of their skin colour.

MINORITY ETHNIC GROUP

A group of people with shared ethnic origin which is numerically small compared to the majority of the population within the community or who may be oppressed because of their lack of power.

RACISM AND INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

The fallacy that one's own culture and values are superior. This leads to oppression of people because of their race including colour, culture, nationality, national and ethnic origin. Racism is embedded in institutional power structures, systems and practices, and used to discriminate against black and minority ethnic members of the community. The Council adopts the Macpherson definitions for racism and institutional racism:

“Racism” in general terms consists of conduct or words or practices which advantage or disadvantage people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. In its more subtle form it is as damaging as in its overt form.

“Institutional racism” consists of the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

Croydon Council recognizes the harmful effect that racism has on black and minority ethnic people both in service delivery and employment. The Council will take immediate steps to rectify any racially discriminatory practice. The Council will acknowledge and value diversity as an asset to be built upon.

In service delivery the Council will recognize diversity, for example in language, diet, dress or faith, and will respond sensitively to the different needs of different groups of people and promote the positive value of that diversity within the community.

In employment the Council recognizes that there is still under-representation of black and minority ethnic staff, particularly in senior positions. The Council will develop structures, policies and training which ensures that this is addressed.

The Council will also work in partnership with other agencies to combat racial harassment and other racist incidents in the community by taking preventative measures and prosecuting wherever possible.

The Council will also do its duty to ensure that refugees living in the borough are given the support they need to settle and challenge discrimination when it occurs.

Equality on the grounds of gender

SEXISM

Gender discrimination stems from the false belief that one gender is superior to the other.

The discrimination takes the forms of prejudiced attitudes suggesting that one gender, usually women, lack certain desirable abilities and characteristics that the other gender possesses.

Sexism is embedded in institutional power structures, systems and practices used to oppress one gender, generally women.

Croydon Council recognizes the harmful effect of sexism and discrimination on grounds of gender.

Negative attitudes and prejudices lead to sexual harassment and discrimination both in service delivery and employment.

The majority of the Council's workforce and service users are women. Barriers in the social construction of women's life experiences make it difficult for women to enter and take part in employment, access services and other community activities on equal terms. The Council will endeavour to enable women to have equal access by providing appropriate child care and safe environments.

In service delivery, the Council must recognize the different needs of women and men. Occasionally it may be appropriate to deliver services separately to women and/or men in order to meet individual and cultural demands.

In employment, the Council will not discriminate on grounds of gender or limit opportunities for career advancement because of marriage, childbirth or caring responsibilities.

The Council recognizes that there is still an under representation of women in senior positions and will address this situation.

The Council must recognize that staff with caring and domestic responsibilities may need to work part-time, flexible working hours or take a career break in order to cope with all their responsibilities. A culture of unreasonably long working hours can discriminate against staff with other responsibilities.

Managers must recognize the needs of women in isolated or male dominated areas and ensure that the culture is not harassing.

The Council will work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate sexual harassment, domestic violence and other hate crimes by taking preventative measures and prosecuting wherever possible.

Equality on the grounds of disability

ABLISM

The belief that disability implies lack of personal ability can distort the way in which an individual person is perceived leading to prejudice and discrimination. People are disabled by physical barriers in the environment and attitudinal barriers in society rather than by their impairment.

Discrimination against disabled people is embedded in institutional power structures, systems and practices used to oppress disabled people.

Disabled people include people with physical and/or sensory impairments, learning disabilities or mental/emotional distress. These may have short or long term effects and are not always visible.

Croydon Council recognizes the many effects of discrimination against disabled people. Negative attitudes, prejudices and physical barriers can lead to discrimination and harassment, both in service delivery and employment.

In service delivery the Council will recognize the differing needs of disabled people and seek to address them through mainstream services. Occasionally it is appropriate to offer specialist provision for disabled people.

The Council recognizes that disabled people have the right to live independent lives and as part of this will ensure that facilities in the borough are accessible. Consultation should take place directly with a disabled person and not through a carer wherever possible.

In employment managers have a responsibility to make reasonable adjustments to the duties of a job and to the work environment in order to make it accessible for a disabled applicant or existing disabled member of staff. This includes both physical access and access to information. The Council also recognizes the under representation of disabled people in the work force and will strive to employ and retain more disabled people.

Equality on the grounds of age

AGEISM

Negative assumptions leading to prejudice and discrimination are ascribed to people because of their age which intensifies the older people become. It is often assumed that young people lack maturity or are unable to take responsibility and that older people are less flexible and lack the ability to learn.

Ageism is embedded in policies, practices and procedures, used to discriminate on grounds of age.

Croydon Council recognizes the harmful effect of ageism and believes that it undervalues older as well as younger people and gives unfair advantage to people within certain age groups.

In service delivery it is important to consult with people of all ages and to adopt different approaches to ensure effective consultation. Services should be appropriate to people's needs, for example black and minority ethnic elders may require different services. Wherever possible consultation should take place directly with the older person and not through a carer.

The Council is committed to a recruitment and employment policy that does not take age into consideration until normal retirement age either in recruitment, promotion, training or for purposes of redundancy. People must have the opportunity to enter and return to the labour market later in life and be given training to update their skills. Older people's experiences must be valued and they must not be denied equal chances for continuous development. People over 50 must not be placed under pressure to retire because of their age. Young people must be given opportunities for training and work experience in order to enhance their employment opportunities.

Equality on the grounds of sexuality

HETEROSEXISM

The belief that heterosexuality is the absolute norm and therefore any other forms of sexuality is abnormal.

HOMOPHOBIA

Negative attitudes and prejudices leading to discrimination against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Heterosexism and homophobia are embedded in institutional power structures, systems and practices used to discriminate against lesbians, gay men and bisexuals.

Croydon Council recognizes the effects of heterosexism and homophobia within society. Negative attitudes and prejudices lead to harassment and discrimination. Expected stereotypical conventions of relationship status and domestic arrangements reinforce collective acts of discrimination.

Discrimination can take place both in service delivery and in employment.

In service delivery, the Council will recognize through direct consultation and monitoring the needs of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. It may be appropriate to deliver some services separately. The Council will respect the right of individuals to be open about their sexuality.

In employment, the Council recognizes the special needs of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals arising from the discrimination they face. All staff must feel safe in 'coming out' if it is their choice.

The Council will work in partnership with other agencies to eliminate harassment, hate crimes and domestic violence by taking preventative measures and prosecuting where appropriate.

Equality on the grounds of religion and faith

Each person's religious belief is a basic human right which must be treated with tolerance and respect. Taking someone else's god's name in vain (blasphemy) or unwontedly promoting one's own faith, can be offensive. People must have the right to object to carry out certain duties on religious grounds.

The Council recognizes the harmful effect that discrimination has on people of different beliefs, both in service delivery and employment.

In service delivery, the Council will ensure sensitivity with regard to people's faiths and not deliver services in a way that is offensive.

In employment, the Council will endeavour to provide facilities to pray and time off for religious festivals which are part of people's faith. The Council will welcome different kinds of dress according to people's cultural and religious persuasions.

The Council will work closely to develop a wider understanding of other people's diverse sensitivities and needs. People must be able to practise their faith in safety without fear of harassment or discrimination.

7. LEGISLATION

The Council will comply with all anti discriminatory legislation including the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (updated 1986), the Equal Pay Act 1970 (updated 1983), the Race Relations Act 1976, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998 and all European regulations and directives.

The Council recognizes that legal obligations in relation to discrimination may overlap between the different groups.

The Council also recognizes that some groups do not benefit from protection of legislation but will ensure good practice in equal opportunities towards those groups through this policy.

8. LANGUAGE

Prejudice can be formed and reinforced by the language we use. It is important not to patronize, stereotype, exclude or make fun of individuals and groups through the language we use. Language is constantly changing. It is therefore important not to use words and expressions which offend people, but use language which the people we talk to find acceptable. It is also important not to discriminate because of an accent or dialect.

Both written and spoken language must be accessible to the community we serve. Language should be clear and jargon free. It should be interpreted and translated into other languages where appropriate. Spoken language must be made accessible to people who are hearing impaired or deaf through loop systems, sign language interpretation, text phones, proper signs, etc. Language must also be made available to people who are blind or visually impaired through large print, braille, tapes, information through voice, etc.

9. IMPLEMENTATION

Relationships with other policies, review and monitoring

The Council will review, monitor and evaluate all policies, procedures and practices both in service delivery, employment and resources allocation from an equalities perspective to ensure that they conform with this policy.

In service delivery, services of all departments will be reviewed from an equalities perspective. The reviews will include monitoring and consultation with the wider community. The service reviews will consider service uptake and quality of services in order to ensure that they meet the diverse needs of residents in Croydon. Services should be accessible and culturally sensitive and meet the Equalities Standard of the Council. Positive action measures, including performance indicators and targets will be used where shortfalls are identified. Departments will be writing an annual report on progress showing to what extent their services meet the Council's Equalities Standard.

The policy will be integrated within other strategies, policies and practices such as Best Value, the Council's anti poverty strategy, community safety strategy, community care plan, etc.

In employment, the Council will ensure that its recruitment policy is being followed. The aim is for the workforce to reflect the community we serve. The Council will monitor the composition of applicants and the existing workforce with regard to ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality and age in order to eliminate discrimination. The Council will use positive action measures and targets to redress any imbalance in the composition, both numerically and at different salary levels, within each department and report on an annual basis.

The Council will also review, monitor and evaluate other personnel policies including the harassment policy, to ensure effective implementation. The Council will require each department to take immediate steps to rectify any discriminatory practice. The Council will not limit opportunities for training and work experience leading to career advancement for any group of staff.

Equality initiatives both in service delivery and employment will form part of job review objectives and performance agreements of managers and other staff.

Training and communication

The Council is committed to equalities training for all staff. This includes specific training on race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, religion, etc. Equalities will form an integral part of the Council's induction and any other training where appropriate. All trainers, facilitators and consultants employed by the Council will be instructed to this effect. Course participants will be monitored in order to ensure fair distribution of training opportunities among different groups of staff.

This policy will be distributed to all Council staff and all short listed applicants.

Responsibilities

Croydon Councillors are ultimately responsible for delivering equalities in Croydon. It is the Members' responsibility to provide overall direction and ownership of the policy.

The Chief Executive and the Chief Officers are responsible for delivering the policy and will be accountable for its implementation. The Council will ensure that all Members, staff, contractors and other organizations working with or receiving funding from the Council, are aware, understand and abide by the content of this policy.

Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to familiarize themselves with the policy and ensure that it is distributed and understood by all staff. Managers and supervisors are responsible for ensuring that they themselves progress the policy and that their staff actively implement the policy and mainstream its provisions.

Every individual member of staff has the responsibility to read, understand and implement the policy.

Complaints

If a service user has a complaint against the Council, the Council policy provides for a three level procedure. In the first place they should contact the section against whom the complaint has been made. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response the complaint should be referred to the Director of the department who will arrange for the complaint to be investigated on their behalf. If the complainant is still dissatisfied they can refer the complaint to the Chief Executive who will arrange for an independent investigation by the Corporate Complaint Manager.

If a member of staff feels that he or she has been discriminated against they should follow the Council's grievance procedure. In cases of harassment, the Council will follow the procedures laid down in the Council's policy for harassment and bullying. These procedures are available from the personnel section of each department.

Complaints of discrimination will be taken seriously. The Council will take corrective action including disciplinary action against members of staff in breach of the policy within agreed procedures where the policy has been abused or ignored.

10. CONCLUSION

This policy has been written in order to make the Council more effective and promote a positive environment where Croydon residents and Council staff can live and work in an atmosphere of greater dignity and respect.

