

Croydon Council

Equality and Inclusion Policy 2014-16

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1. Introduction

People matter most in Croydon. The Council recognises it has an important role in creating a fair society through the services we provide, the money we spend and the people we

employ and is committed to advancing equality and inclusion in everything we do. We are ambitious to create a place where people have a sense of belonging, are united by a sense of shared values around opportunity and fairness so that everyone can lead fulfilling lives.

The Council will take steps to meet need and remove or minimise disadvantage and exclusion. It will foster community cohesion and integration by promoting understanding between diverse community groups and encourage participation in public life.

The Council will not tolerate harassment, victimisation or unlawful discrimination in service delivery and employment on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, ethnicity, religion or belief, gender, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity.

As one of the largest employers in the borough and one of the main providers of local services, the Council is ambitious to achieve excellent equality and inclusion standards in service delivery, decision-making and employment practice and monitor our performance against the national standards that are set out in the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) benchmark.

Everyone who delivers or receives a service from the Council is expected to share the Council's commitment. This includes people or organisations we work in partnership with and those who provide goods and services on our behalf.

The Council believes that a proactive joined-up approach to advancing equality and inclusion will enable us to understand and effectively respond to the individual needs of our residents and staff and provide services that are accessible to all.

The Council will monitor its activity to make sure this happens and will take decisive action against those found to be in breach of this policy.

2. The Legal Framework

2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Equality and Inclusion policy will enable the Council to fulfil its responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) set out in the Equality Act 2010 to take steps to ensure equality, fairness and opportunity for all sections of the community and our workforce. The PSED consists of a “**general duty**” and a “**specific duty**”.

2.1.1 The “general duty”

The “general duty” requires the Council, in the exercise of functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- 1. Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.**

In practice, this means recognising that people who share a protected characteristic (as compared with people who don't share that characteristic) may have faced historic disadvantage and targeted work will need to be undertaken to recognise and address their different needs. The focus should be on addressing:

- Under-representation in certain activities and in the take-up of certain benefits or services.
- Disproportionate experience of poor health, inadequate housing, vulnerability to crime or poor educational outcomes.
- Under-representation in certain jobs and professions.
- Disproportionate concentration in certain low-status occupations or grades.

The Equality Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

2. Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it

In practice, fostering good relations between people who share a particular protected characteristic and those who do not means taking action to:

- Increase integration.
- Reduce the levels of admitted prejudice between people with different protected characteristics.
- Increase understanding of, and reported respect for, difference.
- Increase diversity in civic and political participation (including volunteering).
- Increase reported confidence and trust in public institutions such as the Council.
- Lead to a reduction in bullying, harassment, hate crime and violence against those who share a particular protected characteristic.
- Lead to a reduction in fear of crime, both in respect of those who share a certain protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Equality Act describes fostering good relations as tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups. It explains that compliance with the general equality duty may involve treating some people (such as disabled people) more favourably than others.

3. Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.

In practice, this means that the Council should give advance consideration to issues of potential discrimination before making any policy or funding decisions. This will require actively examining current and proposed policies and practices and taking mitigating actions to ensure that they are not discriminatory or otherwise unlawful under the Act.

It will also require making sure that that the Council does not display conduct that is unreasonable and cannot be objectively justified such as a failure to make reasonable adjustments, indirect discrimination, discrimination arising from disability and positive action in circumstances where it is not permissible.

2.1.2 Strengthening protection on disability equality

The Equality Act has also strengthened the protection that is offered to **disabled people** in the following ways:

- Extended the protection offered to disabled people against direct discrimination in areas beyond the employment field. This will include the supply of goods, facilities and services.
- Introduced improved protection from discrimination that occurs because of something connected with a person's disability. This form of discrimination can be justified if it can be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- Introduced the principle of indirect discrimination related to a disability. Indirect discrimination occurs when something applies in the same way to everybody but has an effect which particularly disadvantages, for example, disabled people. Indirect discrimination may be justified if it can be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- Introduced a duty to make "reasonable adjustments" for disabled people. The trigger point for this is where a disabled person would be at a substantial disadvantage (compared to non-disabled people) if the adjustment was not made.
- Provided protection from direct disability discrimination and harassment where this is based on a person's association with a disabled person, or on a false perception that the person is disabled.
- Introduced a provision which limits the type of enquiries that a recruiting employer can make about disability and health, when recruiting new staff.

2.1.3 Social Model of disability

The Council has formally adopted the social model of disability and will use this to define the actions we take to consider and address the needs of our disabled residents. The social model of disability recognises that the poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers that exist within society that fails to take account of their specific needs.

2.1.4 The specific duty

The **specific duty** requires the council to:

- Publish information to demonstrate how it is complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty every year.
- Prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years.

3. Croydon council's vision for equality and inclusion

The Council recognises that it has an important role in creating a fair, inclusive and cohesive society through its functions as a:

- A community leader
- A provider and commissioner of services
- An employer

Our aim is to make the borough a place where people want to live and work - a place where everyone has fair and equal opportunities and life chances.

The Council recognises that some residents and community groups that share a protected characteristic (such as disability, race, gender, transgender, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation) may have different experiences of council services and employment. Therefore, while taking steps to drive up the quality of life for all, we will also focus on narrowing the gap between disadvantaged groups and the majority population.

The Council will aim to achieve best practice in equality and inclusion and improve the quality of life and opportunities that are available for residents in the borough. By tackling differences in outcomes in relation to service access and delivery, satisfaction with services, opportunities for employment and community trust and confidence the Council will achieve improvements which will directly benefit everyone who lives and works in Croydon.

The Council will adopt and use the following broad principles to develop and deliver best practice in relation to equality and inclusion:

- **Address inequality and social exclusion**

The Council will address inequality, disadvantage and exclusion by narrowing the gap between geographic areas as well as between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not in the workforce and wider community.

- **Engage communities**

The Council will engage proactively and productively with all the communities in the borough including the council's workforce and those who currently have limited or no contact.

- **Support active citizenship**

The Council will support residents and community groups and enable them to participate in the civic life of the borough to the best of their abilities, whenever and however they choose to do so and on the things that matter most to them, their families and neighbourhoods.

- **Build community cohesion**

The Council will develop community trust and confidence and enable diverse communities to articulate service needs, influence decision making and strengthen community cohesion.

- **Display robust community leadership**

The Council will be an exemplary community leader, using diversity as a driver for social and economic growth and prosperity.

- **Provide differentiated services**

The Council will ensure that services are designed and delivered in such a way that they meet the individual need of residents and are accessible.

4. Strategic equality and inclusion priorities

The Council will focus on the following strategic priorities to deliver better outcomes for local people:

1. Make Croydon a place of opportunity and fairness by tackling inequality, disadvantage and exclusion.
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The Council intends to:

- Establish an Opportunity and Fairness commission to examine inequality and listen to the views of local people about what solutions are needed to make a meaningful difference to their lives.

- Lead on and work in partnership with agencies to address inequality, disadvantage and social exclusion to close gaps and improve outcomes across the borough.
- Close gaps in educational attainment by working with local businesses and community groups to enable people of all ages to reach their full potential through access to quality schools and learning.
- Work in partnership to provide a diverse supply of decent homes and a range of housing services that meet the lifetime needs of individuals and families and make for sustainable and thriving communities.
- Work in partnership to lift people out of poverty by increasing employment opportunities across the borough ensuring local people have a pathway into employment, education and training.
- Promote financial and digital inclusion by supporting local people, families and communities, to be resilient and independent.
- Work with statutory and community partners to address health inequalities within the borough through targeted interventions that help people to be resilient and maximise their life chances.

2. Foster good community relations and cohesion by getting to know our diverse communities and understand their needs.

The Council intends to:

- Promote civic pride and a sense of belonging across Croydon by providing opportunities for people to come together and share meaningful interaction.
- Provide engagement and empowerment opportunities for local people in particular, new communities and those that currently do not have a voice.
- Lead on and work in partnership with agencies and the community to change attitudes and behaviours towards domestic abuse, sexual violence and female genital mutilation.
- Work in partnership with agencies and communities to change attitudes and behaviours, dispel myths and address hate crime in particular disability, race, faith / religion and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender).
- Encourage greater community participation in the promotion of community-led social and cultural activities.
- Consistently monitor the take-up of services and complaints by “protected characteristics” and identify any potential inequality or disadvantage that should be addressed.

- Collect and analyse a range of information to identify specific individual or community needs and target resources to tackle persistent inequalities.

3. Encourage local people to be independent and resilient by providing responsive and accessible services and offering excellent customer care.

The Council intends to:

- Lead on promoting dignity and respect for older people and those with a disability and ensure that standards are set for our partners and contractors to adhere to.
- Explore opportunities for integrated community-based health and social care services that are preventative and support people to live independently.
- Lead on strengthening the Council's safeguarding processes for adults and children and work in partnership with the police, community, faith and voluntary sectors, hospitals and GPs, to make every effort to change attitudes and behaviours and prevent incidents taking place in our community.
- Integrate equality and inclusion considerations into the council's procurement framework and ensure that all contractors have an understanding of Croydon's diverse communities and how specific service needs should be addressed.
- Provide accessible information by maintaining a record of the specific access needs of our residents and use this to provide information in alternate formats such as Easy Read, Braille, large print, audio tape etc. and offer a translation and interpretation service if requested. For further details, please see the Accessible Information Statement (Appendix 1).
- Carry out an equality analysis of all new or revised policies, procedures and practices and use this insight to deliver accessible and differentiated services.
- Introduce a customer charter to improve customer satisfaction with the services we provide to ensure they are accessible and responsive to community needs.

4. Improve empowerment and participation by strengthening partnership work with community, faith and voluntary sectors.

The Council intends to:

- Strengthen the Local Strategic Partnership ensuring that the community, faith, and voluntary sector can influence and make a difference to the outcomes for local people.
- Encourage community cohesion and partnership by facilitating a greater community response to tough issues as a way of changing attitudes and behaviours in the workplace and wider community.
- Create accessible and inclusive ways for people, including staff, to participate in council, community and civic life.
- Ensure that the communications the Council produces meet the needs and preferences of individuals and can be accessed by our diverse communities.
- Encourage partners from all sectors to be inclusive and accessible by working in partnership with local people to remove the barriers that prevent them from participating in community and civic life.

5. Provide strong leadership, partnership and organisational commitment by enabling staff and communities to find solutions to the things that matter most to them.

The Council intends to:

- Provide ambitious community leadership to enable staff and residents to take action to find solutions to the things that matter most to them.
- Strengthen and use social value to provide local jobs and apprenticeships for people.
- Lead the implementation of the London Living Wage within the Council and across the borough.
- Ensure that councillors and officers take account of equality and inclusion considerations in any key decision that is made by the Council.
- Make sure that the diverse views of local people are taken into account when decisions are made by the Council.
- Mainstream equality into the scrutiny of funding decisions and service reviews.
- Create awareness of and celebrate the diversity of cultures, lifestyles and faiths within the workforce and wider community.

6. Become an employer of choice by recruiting, developing and retaining an efficient, talented and motivated workforce that broadly reflects the communities that we serve at all levels.

The Council intends to:

- Develop forums to engage with staff in particular, focus on understanding perceived barriers to progression for women, BME and disabled staff.
- Explore opportunities to develop a new leadership offer for women, BME and disabled staff.
- Benchmark performance using the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and other external accreditation and take action to deliver improvements.
- Provide training to all staff to increase their knowledge of equality and develop skills to plan and deliver fair and accessible services.
- Become a Disability Confident organisation, by working with employers to remove barriers to work that disabled people face, increase understanding of disability and ensure disabled people have opportunities to fulfill their potential.

5. Governance arrangements for equality and inclusion

These strategic priorities will enable the Council to work with partners in the public, community, faith, voluntary and business sectors to deliver the highest standard of equalities and inclusion practice and secure better outcomes for local people.

The Council will monitor the delivery of the equality and inclusion policy and publish a statutory annual report on progress.

The individual roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the equality and inclusion policy are outlined below:

Cabinet and elected members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide leadership and accountability on equality and inclusion.• Review the council's annual performance to ensure that we provide services that are accessible, meet individual need and our regulatory and legislative obligations.
Corporate Leadership Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that appropriate leadership, resources and governance arrangements are in place to deliver the council's equality and inclusion vision and objectives.
Communities Board / Culture Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lead on defining the strategic equality and inclusion objectives for the council, review progress and set targets for service improvements.

Departmental Management Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead on developing and implementing equality and inclusion action plans as a part of the annual service planning and review process and deliver service improvements for all residents. • Cascade information, identify and share best practice within teams.
Council Staff, Contractors and Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for understanding and applying the Council's equality and inclusion objectives, standards and behaviours in their interactions with residents and colleagues.
Equality and Inclusion team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work as a business partner and provide strategic advice and support to enable colleagues to define and deliver fair and accessible services.

6. Annual publication of information

The Council has a statutory obligation to publish information on its performance on equality and inclusion on an annual basis and demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the PSED set out in Equality Act 2010. For this purpose, we will publish an annual equality report (by 31 January each year).

7. Benchmarking performance

Croydon Council aims to be a leading authority for promoting equality and inclusion in local services and an employer of choice. Our aspiration is to be accredited as 'excellent' for embedding equality and inclusion into our mainstream functions.

The equality and inclusion policy is also closely aligned to the strategic themes of the **Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)** - an external national benchmark that is used to measure organisational performance on equality and inclusion and plan improvements.

The Equality Framework consists of five cross-cutting and performance driven principles which align with the PSED. These are:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce

These principles are at the centre of the Council's equality and inclusion policy. They have been adopted and translated into our equality priorities which provide a framework to manage performance and service improvement across the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership. They will also enable the Council to continue its journey to become an excellent authority for all of its communities.

8. Taking action when things go wrong

As a Council we aim to apply the highest equality and inclusion standards, however, despite the best intentions sometimes things can go wrong.

The Council acknowledges that people have the right to complain about either a service they have received from us, a contractor that provides services on our behalf, or their experience in the workplace. The Council has a formal complaints procedure for service users and a grievance procedure for employees. We also have a procedure for harassment and bullying for those who feel they have faced discrimination through service delivery or employment.

The Council takes all complaints seriously and actively encourages people to voice their concern when things go wrong, so that the issue can be addressed and lessons can be learnt. Responding to and learning from complaints will form a key part of the Council's drive for better local services.

The Council does not tolerate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation and will take decisive and appropriate action against people found in breach of this policy.

Employees found in breach of this policy may be liable to disciplinary action including dismissal.

Appendix 1 Accessible Information Statement

Croydon Council believes that effective information and communication are vital for the provision of high-quality services and good customer care. Through our equality and inclusion policy, we have made a commitment to ensure that our customers can access our services with ease, irrespective of their disability, literacy skills and nationality.

The Council recognises that many of the residents who access our services may have difficulty understanding the information we provide. This might be because they are visually impaired, hearing impaired, have a learning difficulty, have dyslexia or because English is not their first language. It may also be because they need support in terms of reading (due to literacy needs) or they have a health condition which limits their ability to communicate.

The Council will ensure that information produced for residents is presented in an accessible way, in a range of formats and in specific community languages that are used and understood by our diverse community.

The Council will aim to provide information that is accessible using new digital technology, in printed and electronic formats, and through face-to-face and telephone communication using the EAST (easy, accessible, simple and timely) principle. The tools that we will use to provide accessible information include:

Easy Read Documents	<p>The Council will produce documents in plain English.</p> <p>All important documents such as the community strategy, the Council's corporate plan and other partnership policies will be produced in an easy, accessible, simple and timely (EAST) format.</p>
Information in alternative formats	<p>The Council will provide information in alternative formats including new digital technology. This will include a summary of documents in large print version, Braille, audiotape and CD.</p> <p>The Council will also use induction loops and text-phones to communicate with residents.</p>
Interpretation	<p>The Council will offer British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, BSL videos /DVDs, web technology for residents with specific needs including use of Language Line as appropriate.</p>
Translation	<p>The Council will provide key service information in another language or format when requested by a resident including making use of new digital technology.</p> <p>This may include a written summary of the main text but not a full translation or transcription.</p>
Website accessibility	<p>The Council will make sure that our website is accessible and easy to use for everyone.</p> <p>This will include the use of browse aloud, the option to translate pages and adjust the font size and colour.</p>