Lewisham Equal Opportunities Policy Statement

Lewisham Council is committed to equal opportunities both in the provision of services and as an employer. The seriousness of this commitment is reflected in the Council adopting equal opportunities as one of its core values.

EQUALITY of opportunity for all sections of our community and workforce is an essential value for this Council. This means recognising the inequalities which people suffer and take action to reduce them. Everyone has a role to play in ensuring fairness towards colleagues and the community.

This commitment is integral to the provision of any service and the employment conditions of each and every member of staff. We expect all our staff to promote equality in the workplace and in the services we deliver. In this way, the Council can redress inequality.

Equal opportunities means access to jobs, services, information and participation for everyone. We recognise that because some groups of people experience prejudice and discrimination that to make opportunities really available we have to make an extra effort. We mention some groups in particular because they are the people who have commonly been disadvantaged. The Council's commitment to a fair deal for women, black people, lesbians and gay men, pensioners and disabled people is a recognition of the difficulties and inequalities which these groups continue to face. The Council is committed to tackling class disadvantage and has a long history of providing services which improve the quality of life and life chances of working class people.

Lewisham Council exists to represent and provide services for all the people of the Borough.

Our equal opportunity policy requires that the Council recognises and respects cultural and religious diversity and serves all sections of our local communities. Everyone should know what is available from the Council. Access to services will be based on need or entitlement. The Council will be open in its approach and make sure that we find out and take and take account of the views and experiences of our diverse community. The varied needs, expectations and culture of local people will be reflected in the range, sensitivity and relevance of our services.

In the context of pressures on resources and change, achieving equality assumes and even greater importance and requires even greater commitment. The Council is proud of progress made so far, is committed to protecting gains made and to developing new and innovative way of promoting and achieving equality of opportunity and outcomes.

What does our policy cover?

COUNCIL'S FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Friendly, responsive and accessible services

Services need to be welcoming to all and able to understand and respond to a variety of needs and requirements. This means being prepared to adapt and change what we provide. For example, by providing multi-cultural meals for pensioners and in our schools; a multiracial Under Fives service, catering for children with disabilities and special needs; a refuse collection which in general offers a kerb side collection but which provides a doorstep service for disabled people or pensioners requiring it; leisure facilities for working-class teenagers.

Services based on need

To make sure we have got it right, we need to know what the needs or requirements of the different groups are. This means knowing about population trends and the numbers of the relevant groups for our services. It also means knowing the composition of the different age group by gender, race and disability and knowing the numbers of lesbians and gay men in our communities. It is vital to know the make up of the relevant target population so we can assess whether services are reaching all sections. This includes knowing about income levels in the Borough so that those most in need are receiving vital services and benefits.

Services for all

Our equal opportunities policies in employment are designed to lead to better services which are sensitive to the variety of needs and requirements in our local communities. We aim to give fair access to our services to everyone and this may mean making some special or separate provision. For example, we offer women-only leisure activities with some activities for black women in particular and leisure sessions for disabled people; we fund leisure groups and events for gay men and provide a day centre for black and ethnic minority pensioners; we provide 'second chance' education opportunities for working-class students. We also encourage all sections of the community to use the Council's facilities and services.

Consulting local people

We need to make sure that we know people's views and experiences of our services. This requires us to check that the groups we talk to regularly, such as tenants associations, are representative of a cross-section of local people. It also means making special or separate arrangements to consult various groups, perhaps using a range of methods, not just our traditional meeting format. This is in recognition of the fact that some of the established groups do not represent the different sections of the community. It is also a recognition that public meetings may provide access for the articulate middle class and disadvantaged working-class people.

Knowing who is using our services

Our policy framework also includes monitoring take up of service so we can check that target groups have access and that use of Council services is in line with what we know about needs among different groups. Monitoring is not an end in itself but a means of checking how effective we are being and of then changing, adapting or targeting services.

Targeting resources

In a climate of defining resources, there will be difficult decisions to be made about resource allocation. Equal opportunities require us to make choices which reflect current needs rather than traditional ways of apportioning services. This means reviewing use to see that it is in line with needs and not simply continuing to deliver a service to the same group of people in the same way.

Information for everyone

Information about services is a crucial element of an equal opportunities framework. If it is not made available in an understandable form to all sections, then access to service is in practice restricted to those people "in the know." Information should be widely circulated, available in different forms and languages and encourage all groups to use the service. It also needs to make clear to everyone what determines access to services. Clear information about entitlement and about service standards is also important.

Representation

The Council is not just a provider of services, it is also a local government designed to give people a say in how their local area is run. All sections of our local community need to be able to identify with the Council and feel that they will be listened to. They also need to feel that they are represented in the decision-making process and have some influence on the policy makers. Our approach to co-options is a way of giving disadvantaged groups additional representation at committee level. Our approach to consultation is also part of giving local people greater influence.

EMPLOYMENT

In a service organisation like ours, the workforce is at the heart of our commitment to service quality and equality of opportunity. The people who manage and provide the Council's services should reflect the diversity of our local communities. This will help us to respond sensitively and effectively to a variety of needs and preferences.

To achieve high quality services, we will do all we can to develop a committed and highly motivated workforce. This will involve excellent communications throughout our organisation; training and development for staff at all levels; and management leadership which sets clear goals and encourages participation. In recognition of the high standards we demand from our employees, the Council is committed to good employment practices including responsive, innovative and flexible working arrangements.

Every manager of a service has a responsibility to ensure that their service area reflects and develops the Council's equal opportunities policies. All targets and quality standards will take into account this policy statement.

Fair Recruitment

We need to show our commitment to equal opportunities in practice. This means fair selection which recruits people according to their ability to do the job and leads to a workforce which has a good cross section of people and reflects the makeup of our local communities.

Positive Action to equalise chances

We know that everyone in our society does not have an equal chance, and equal opportunities means taking step to make up for this inequality. This can take the form of positive action, such as training, to give disadvantaged groups the knowledge and skills needed to be able to take up job opportunities. It also means removing unnecessary educational requirements which disadvantage many people. This is particularly important to make sure that all jobs are open to all at every level and in every type of work in the Council.

A welcoming and comfortable workplace

Making all employees feel welcome and creating a safe environment is also part of equal opportunities. This is why we have a policy and procedure to deal with harassment, whether based on race, gender, sexuality or disability. We want all employees to know that everyone has the right to respect and that we will not tolerate behaviour which threatens groups or individuals.

Flexible work

We recognise that flexible work and career breaks and childcare support are important for equal opportunities. This is why we have maternity and nominated support leave, adoption and dependants' leave. It is why we have job share and want to develop new policies for flexible work patterns and child care initiatives such as our workplace creche and childcare allowances. We recognise that women are more likely to bear the caring responsibilities and that equal opportunities will only be a reality if there is this kind of support. It is also a way of encouraging men to share responsibility for family care.

Valuing ALL employees

Showing that we value all staff, providing everyone with what they need to do a good job, creating opportunities to develop new skills and progress within the Council, are all important ways of demonstrating equal opportunities in practice. Our policies are designed to set a framework for mangers to do this.