

## **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 mean 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 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 an 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 ways of promoting and achieving equality of opportunity and outcomes.

### **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.

### **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 managers to do this.