

Introduction

Our equality and diversity policy outlines our aims, commitments, roles and responsibilities, and good practice that we will always strive to achieve. This policy is crucial to provide the overview and context for our approach which is to identify and address areas of inequality, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in all our work.

In order to work towards creating a fairer society, the council recognises that:

- equality is an issue for everyone;
- we don't all start from the same place; and
- we need to recognise different needs.

Giving due regard to equality and diversity is embedded into our key decision making process which impacts on all our policies, practices and service provision. We will continue to use our equality impact assessment process to demonstrate this. This helps us to target our efforts where improvement is most needed to tackle inequalities within and between communities.

We will embed equality and diversity by focusing activity and action on the five key areas as outlined below:

Understanding our communities

Leeds continues to grow in its diversity and we need to understand who lives and works in our city and who uses the city's facilities for cultural and leisure purposes. With the population of Leeds changing faster than ever, we need to understand these changes to communities, what their experiences are, and how we should deliver services in the most appropriate way.

It is also important to understand differences within and between communities. We know that there are great differences, as well as similarities, for example, in the experiences of women and men. The experience of all groups will also be affected by socio-economic factors.

We are committed to:

providing good evidence of the equalities profile of our communities based on national and local data; and
identifying the changing nature of communities and their needs.

We will continue to use this information to help identify our priority actions which will have clear measures for assessing progress. We will strengthen how we tell people about how we reached our decisions and share our progress and achievements.

Showing leadership and working in partnership

Strategic leadership is key to improving our equality outcomes. Elected members in particular have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the council's performance and strategic aims. Very often it will be elected members who have

the greatest knowledge of the needs of different sections of the community and changes in the population of their local area. Elected members and senior officers champion equality in Leeds. They take a lead in setting equality priorities, challenging our approach and monitoring equality outcomes and improvements.

We will continue to ensure that due regard is given to the relevance and proportionality of equality in the development and review of strategies, policies, functions and services. This will be done through the use of the equality impact assessment screening process.

Across the council we have a network of key staff and forums across Directorates and Services who promote and lead on implementing the council's agreed equality priorities, as well as, undertaking innovative work at a local service level. This helps show clear progress towards achieving outcomes that address persistent inequality and promote equality of opportunity.

We work in partnership with a wide range of bodies which include the health sector, police, fire and rescue services and the third sector. This is vital to deliver real outcomes for the whole city. Partnerships are vital to addressing inequalities and improving the life chances for all as they help us to share information, pool resources and take collective responsibility and action.

Leeds continues to be used as an exemplar of notable practice by other local authorities and agencies. We need to continue to be realistic about our progress and the challenges we face whilst also recognising and publicising our achievements.

Involving our communities

In Leeds we recognise the importance of involving communities in decision making and we regularly consult and involve the people of Leeds when shaping and changing services.

Involvement can be done in many different ways. Key elements for the council are effective consultation, research, and representation of interested groups within appropriate boards and forums.

We also recognise the need to have dedicated consultation and involvement mechanisms for particular communities where there are known inequalities and barriers to access and participation. The 'Equalities Assembly' brings together representatives from many communities of interest including Black and Minority Ethnic, Lesbian, Gay and Bi-sexual, Disabled, Faith based and those who care for adults or disabled children.

Involvement helps the council understand different needs, priorities, expectations and experiences that can be used to shape and change our services and employment practices.

People focused services and customer care

We recognise the need to personalise services to meet the needs of people with different backgrounds and ensure fair access. We place particular emphasis on giving due consideration to equality when improving existing, developing new or procuring/commissioning services.

We have a comprehensive approach to making equality and diversity learning and development available to staff which assists us in ensuring that all our customers receive excellent customer care.

Compliments are always welcome and we strive to improve satisfaction from our customers, employees and partners. But we recognise we don't always get it right and where we fail to meet our standards we have a robust approach to equality complaints, the outcomes from which are shared to ensure we learn from them.

A modern and diverse workforce

Leeds is the largest employer in the city and one that is fully committed to advancing equality of opportunity. 'Treating People Fairly' is one of the council's five values that underpin its culture. This expects all people to be treated with dignity and respect – free of unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation whether in employment or accessing services.

The skills, understanding and commitment of our staff are vital to ensuring we deliver high quality, accessible and person centred services. We use data to develop relevant equality objectives within our workforce strategies and service plans, for example improving the representation at senior levels of women, disabled and black and minority ethnic people and where there is under representation in other parts of the organisation, which could be men in traditionally perceived female roles.

Financial challenges mean that council workforces are experiencing huge changes. In this context, our objectives focus on maintaining engagement and utilising opportunities to improve the diversity of representation in our workforce

There are a wide range of employment policies and practices in place. All of these are assessed for their relevance to equality and diversity and improvements are made to ensure they are fair and accessible.

Equal pay continues to be an important issue for the council and work continues to progress in this area.

**For enquiries about Leeds City Council's equality improvement priorities 2011 - 2015 please contact the Equality Team:
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