

WEAR VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

POLICY ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN SERVICE DELIVERY1. POLICY STATEMENT

The Council wants to reduce any disadvantage experienced by people in Wear Valley by making its services, as far as practicable, responsive to different community and individual needs. We want our services, facilities and resources to be accessible and useful to every citizen regardless of gender, age, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religious belief, disability, marital status, sexual orientation or any other individual characteristic which may unfairly affect a person's opportunities in life.

The Council recognises that people are different and must be treated as individuals. However, some kinds of disadvantage are widely shared and where individuals have common needs we will address them through specific strategies. These strategies will offer a framework within which the Council can develop its services to the entire community by the creation of an accessible environment through training, awareness, understanding and provision.

2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

To ensure that the following strategies can be implemented successfully the Council needs to gather detailed information about the population it serves and about any other potential customers which may be deterred from using our services. Consultation with appropriate groups that may be able to offer advice on the needs and potential difficulties encountered by certain individuals and groups will also be undertaken. When changes in services are contemplated, we shall consult with interested parties to ensure that measures which may assist minority groups to use the service more fully are incorporated.

3. GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY STATEMENT

The Council is committed to achieving gender equality in Wear Valley. We recognise our duties under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986 legislation, **Gender Reassignment Act 2004**, and codes of practice, and undertake to strive for gender equality in service provision. To achieve our aims we shall:

- a) take into account the requirements of all service users, irrespective of gender, by taking informed advice on organisational arrangements.
- b) evaluate all Council published material to check for unnecessary gender bias;
- c) work with other agencies and community groups to promote gender equality and eliminate disadvantage;

- d) require all contractors to provide satisfactory evidence of their commitment to gender equality;
- e) provide awareness raising and gender equality training for all employees.

4. RACE EQUALITY STRATEGY STATEMENT

The Council is committed to achieving racial equality in Wear Valley. We accept the right of minorities to be different, and value this diversity. We also recognise our duties under the Race Relations Act 1976 (Amendment) regulations 2003 and related codes of practice, and undertake to strive for racial equality in service provision and to promote good relations between all racial groups. To achieve our aims we shall:

- a) consider the requirements of all service users, taking into account racial grounds, using informed advice on organisational arrangements.
- b) provide services relevant to people's needs, which respect their cultural and social identities;
- c) ensure that our services are accessible and available to all members of all minority groups, for example by considering translation of literature into languages which will assist ethnic minorities to understand better the service that the Council provides and therefore encourage wider use;
- d) work with other agencies to promote racial equality and eliminate racist behaviour;
- e) endeavour to ensure that our service users reflect the ethnic composition of the local population we serve;
- f) evaluate all Council published material to check for racial bias;
- g) require all contractors to provide satisfactory evidence of their commitment to racial equality;
- h) provide awareness and racial equality training for employees.

5. DISABILITY STRATEGY STATEMENT

The Council is committed to equality of opportunity for disabled people. We recognise that disabled people are disadvantaged by an environment and by social attitudes which reflect principally the needs of non-disabled people. We recognise our duties under the **Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) regulations 2003**, and related codes of practice and therefore commit ourselves to the objective of making our services, facilities and resources equally accessible and useful to all.

To achieve our aims we shall:

- a) undertake an access audit of all Council buildings and facilities to identify potential barriers in respect of physical access, access to information and staff awareness;

- b) strive to provide services which are relevant to disabled people's needs, taking into account the disabling effect of the environment, organisation and attitude and taking informed advice on organisational arrangements and physical provision;
- c) whenever possible, modify our procedures or equipment to make full use of an individual's ability and adapt our facilities to accommodate disabled people;
- d) work with other agencies and community groups to promote equality and eliminate disadvantage against disabled people;
- e) require all contractors to provide satisfactory evidence of their commitment to disability equality;
- f) evaluate all Council published material to check for disability bias and to ensure that the appropriate terminology is used;
- g) provide awareness raising and disability equality training for all employees.

6) COMPLAINTS/GRIEVANCES

An officer will be appointed within each department to allow individuals to express grievances in a safe and secure manner without fear of any intimidation. On receipt and investigation of such grievances these officers will report their findings to the Head of Department. If the complaint cannot be resolved at this level, the individual wishing to pursue the complaint will be given direction on how to continue under the Council's Complaints Procedure.

7) IMPLEMENTATION

The Council requires all departments to demonstrate their commitment to these aims by producing Action Plans showing how they will implement this policy.

8) MONITORING

Close monitoring and regular, timely evaluation of the strategy is vital for its success. Departmental performance against the policy must be measured to identify use of Council services and determine whether the measures are succeeding in increasing the number of targeted groups. Each Head of Department is responsible for ensuring that measurable criteria is identified and monitored on a regular basis.

The Principal Personnel Officer will develop and maintain appropriate systems of monitoring the Council's performance against this policy. An annual report will be presented to the Central Resources Committee for Members' consideration.

This policy will be reviewed continually and specific initiatives and programmes will be introduced from time to time within its terms of reference.

9. RESPONSIBILITIES OF ALL EMPLOYEES

Heads of Departments will be responsible for briefing employees and raising awareness of the issues within this policy. All employees are required to comply with the policy and also within the general philosophy of equal opportunities. They are expected to ensure that their actions cannot be construed as discriminatory. Unfair treatment of any customer/member of the public, for whatever reason, is prejudicial to good customer relations and will in general constitute a disciplinary offence.