

Gateshead Equality Strategy



*Embrace equality
and value difference*

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Foreword

We are delighted to welcome you to Gateshead's first Equality Strategy.

Gateshead is a changing borough, and it is vital that we engage with that change. Everyone who lives, works in and visits Gateshead makes an important contribution to community life. They bring their own unique skills, ideas and fresh perspectives to the borough, and they all deserve to be equally valued.

Discrimination and harassment is a serious abuse of human rights that has no place in Gateshead. The Government has made its determination to eradicate inequality very clear, and has acted accordingly. A whole range of legislation has come into force over recent years to deal with crimes motivated or aggravated by discrimination based on disability, age, gender, transgender, race, religion, or sexual orientation.

If we are to stamp out inequality we need to go beyond legislation and law enforcement. We need to foster an attitude of "zero tolerance" towards prejudice in all its forms - across the whole community. And we need to achieve a society where different people from different backgrounds can live together, not just side by side.

This Strategy outlines how Gateshead Council intends to make equality a reality in all areas of its activities, such as employment practices, provision of services and working with partners.

It includes detailed plans for improvements we believe we need to make. However most importantly it focuses on how we can make sure these plans work, and make a difference to people in Gateshead who currently face disadvantage and discrimination.

We would like to thank all the individuals and groups in Gateshead, for working so hard work with us over the last year and sharing their vision of a future borough. We would also like to thank our partners from the public, private, community and voluntary sectors who have contributed to the process, and helped to develop this Strategy. Together, we will continue to work together to ensure that everyone in Gateshead has the recognition and support they deserve, to lead fulfilling lives and achieve their full potential.



Mick Henry

Cllr Mick Henry, Leader of the Council and Chair of the Gateshead Strategic Partnership



Roger Kelly

Roger Kelly, Chief Executive, Gateshead Council

Executive Summary

This is Gateshead Council's first Equality Strategy, effective from September 2006 to March 2010. It incorporates the Council's Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes. The Strategy sets out how the Council will tackle discrimination, promote equality of opportunity for all and help contribute towards good relations between the diverse communities and groups that make up Gateshead.

The Strategy focuses on the six key equality strands: age, disability, gender, transgender, race, faith and religion, and sexual orientation. It spells out what they mean for those who live, work in and visit Gateshead, and the priority issues to be tackled in each area.

The Strategy identifies 10 key outcomes:

1. Council employees who have a good awareness of the needs of residents from minority or under-served communities, and are proactive in ensuring appropriate support is in place.
2. Residents from minority or under-served communities who are aware of the key services and support networks available to them.
3. Residents with specific language or health needs who receive Council information in the appropriate format or language.
4. Residents from minority or under-served communities who feel safe and free from harassment, and can report incidents in the knowledge that issues will be handled sensitively and effectively.
5. Consultation that is directly targeted at the needs of individuals and communities.
6. Council information and promotional material that is representative of Gateshead's different minority and under-served communities, and which promotes positive images.
7. Development of a 'disability offer', so that those with disabilities are offered a basic multi-agency entitlement of services which they will be able to access in Gateshead. This will help to join services together and enable disabled people to pass between services safely and securely.
8. An accessible transport infrastructure, with easy access to major services.
9. Housing that supports independent living for disabled residents, and meets the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents, and faith communities.
10. Establishing and promoting a 'Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual friendly' Gateshead.

Focusing activity and targeting resources in these areas will have the greatest impact on tackling discrimination and promoting equality in Gateshead. Identification of the 10 outcomes was informed by Government guidance and consultation with residents and partners.

The Strategy also sets out how the Council will continue to engage with stakeholders to develop equality based objectives and targets, as well as developing monitoring and scrutiny of services and policies.

The Strategy is supported by a robust action plan, which sets out a phased approach to achieving the Strategy's outcomes. Progress against the action plan will be monitored via the Corporate Equality Group. The Strategy and Action Plan will be reviewed on an annual basis.

If you have any questions about Gateshead's Equality Impact Assessment process, or would like any further information, please contact **Nitin Shukla, Diversity Officer, Gateshead Council** on Tel: **0191 433 2069** or Email: nitinshukla@gateshead.gov.uk

Introduction

About the Strategy

The Gateshead Equality Strategy is effective from September 2006 to March 2010. It identifies the main activities that the Council will carry out over future years to improve outcomes for minority and under-served communities in Gateshead.

The Strategy deals with issues that affect **everyone** in the borough - from both majority and minority communities. However, a key focus is inevitably people from a minority or under-served background. This does **not** mean privileging some people over other members of the community; rather, it is about getting much better at identifying and responding to the specific needs of different people and ensuring that everyone in Gateshead is accorded her or his human rights, and support is available to those who require it.

This **Introduction** explains how the Council has developed the Strategy, who was consulted and how the views and opinions of local people influenced it. It also outlines how the Council engages and communicates with minority groups on a day-to-day basis.

Section 4, 'National and Strategic contexts', sets out the background to the Strategy. It summarises the legislation informing the Strategy, and explains how it sits in relation to other key plans and decision-making structures in Gateshead.

Section 5, 'The Council as an employer', summarises the Council's approach to promoting equality of opportunity as an employer, and its aims in ensuring a workforce that is representative of the population.

Section 6, 'Vision and outcomes', is the main section of the Strategy. It describes the 10 key outcomes the Council wants to achieve for everyone in Gateshead.

Sections 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 examine in turn the areas of **age, disability, gender, race and faith**, and **sexual orientation**. It summarises the key issues, the work that is already ongoing in these areas, and what local people have told us they want to see happen over the next three years.

Section 12, 'Performance and review', sets out how we will monitor our progress against the Strategy, and make sure we achieve our vision.

How we developed the Strategy

The development of this Strategy has been informed by the existing legislative framework for equalities and a Council-wide two-phased Equality Impact Assessment process.

Equality Impact Assessments

Equality Impact Assessments are essentially about 'equality proofing' all policies and services, to ensure that they support the Council's vision for Gateshead, and do not inadvertently discriminate against any minority group. They enable equality to be mainstreamed into the full range of Council policies and services, by highlighting good practice and areas that require improvement. In addition, they are also about ensuring that where minority groups have particular needs, these are supported appropriately.

If you have any questions about Gateshead's Equality Impact Assessment process, or would like any further information, please contact **Nitin Shukla, Diversity Officer, Gateshead Council** on Tel: **0191 433 2069** or Email: nitinshukla@gateshead.gov.uk

The first phase - review of all policies

The first phase of Gateshead's impact assessment process required all heads of service to undertake a thorough review of all policies and services within their remit. In order to meet the requirements of the race, disability and gender equality duties, all policies and services were examined in relation to their relevance to the 'general' disability, gender and equality duties, using a standardised assessment grid. The following issues were also considered:

- Where the policy complied with existing legislation
- The impact of the policy in tackling discrimination or inequality
- Promoting equality of opportunity
- Promoting good relations between minority/under-served/majority groups
- What evidence was available to assess whether some minority groups could be differently affected and to specify the groups

This process enabled evidence to be gathered to inform decisions about the appropriateness of services, and determine the nature of their impact on those who live, work in and visit the borough. It also enabled the quality of information currently collected on services to be scrutinised, ensuring that any gaps identified in terms of information gathering could be identified.

This first phase of the impact assessment process was subject to random 'reality checks' by external residents' groups. Feedback about the robustness of the Council's methodology and approach has been positive, and raised some helpful issues to strengthen the process further.

The second phase - consultation and engagement

The second phase of impact assessments involved full consultation and engagement with minority and under-served groups on barriers to services, key issues and priority and objective setting. The Council wanted to identify the key issues affecting under-served communities in Gateshead, to inform service design and commissioning to 2030. It also wanted to make a very clear statement about its commitment to equality and tackling discrimination.

This laid the foundation for putting equality into context by focussing on the key issues that are important to those living and working within Gateshead. This included issues such as the accessibility of both Council and non-Council services, and the appropriateness of consultation mechanisms.

The consultation was highly successful. In total, the Council supported by key partners such as the Police, The Gateshead Housing Company, the Primary Care Trust and Connexions, engaged nearly four hundred residents drawn from a variety of different backgrounds. The events produced high quality data and identified specific issues to be tackled jointly by partners over the next 25 years. User feedback from a wide range of sources has been positive and very encouraging.

The different approaches undertaken

Age

For the consultation on age, the Council took a very innovative approach. In addition to obtaining quality data, it wanted to brand it as a social event, to encourage older people to view it as an opportunity to make new friends and feel sufficiently confident to come by themselves if they lived on their own or had no one to accompany them. To accomplish this a Saturday 'discussion lunch' was organised, arranged around a three-course sit down meal. A dining area was set up in the Council's restaurant, and participants were allocated a dinner table and their own 'waiter' (the table's facilitator). Printed menus set out the lunch choices available, and summarised a range of topics to be discussed over each course.

Disability

For disability, the Council again took a very specialised approach. Not only are Gateshead's disability groups well organised and articulate, The Gateshead Housing Company had undertaken a broad consultation exercise in the recent past. The Council decided to use the event as an opportunity to expose different disability organisations to the issues experienced by other disability groups. Service users from Gateshead attended the event representing individuals with physical disabilities, mental health, learning disabilities and visual and hearing impairments. In addition to service users, key Council partners also attended including Gateshead Access Panel, Gateshead Sight Service, Gateshead Deaf Forum and Gateshead Primary Care Trust enabling representative views to be gathered from a range of sources.

Gender

The gender events presented a particular challenge, because the Council wanted to consult individuals from all key demographics and life stages. For a variety of reasons (and unlike minority groups in relation to race and disability), men and women tend not to articulate their views as a homogenous group. After identifying the key demographics to engage with, a range of individually tailored strongly branded focus groups were delivered. These included quiz style events and 'coffee and croissant' morning sessions.

Race

Gateshead has a variety of different racial and faith groups, which are mobilised and articulate. However, the Council wanted to make a real statement about its high level of commitment to the issue of race equality and tackling race-related crime. It also wanted to attract individuals who were not necessarily attached to any particular local group.

In view of this, the Council organised a conference style networking event, with a keynote speaker. The conference was opened by the Leader of the Council and the Chair of the Gateshead Strategic Partnership. Fringe events and focus groups were chaired by high profile partners, such as the Chief Superintendent of Gateshead Area Command. This had an important impact on the confidence levels of participants, which was demonstrated unequivocally in the feedback sessions which followed.

Sexual orientation

For the lesbian, gay and bisexual event, it was again important to make a very clear statement about the Council's commitment to this issue, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the topic of discussion was sexuality, an obviously personal subject for many people. Providing a safe space was crucial. Secondly, many lesbian, gay and bisexual people are still hesitant to engage with local authorities despite the repeal of Section 28.

To address these issues the Council held a big keynote event at the iconic Sage Gateshead, and promoted it with a very upbeat theme which included live entertainment. Background music was played from the beginning, to create a relaxed atmosphere and provide 'background noise', so that people felt more comfortable talking. To give everyone the opportunity to speak on issues that concerned them, the event had a 'carousel' table top structure, with intermittent loud party music to indicate that it was time to change tables, and relieve anxiety and reduce tension.

In addition, a range of focus groups on each of the equality strands were held with employees.

What we found

The assessments and consultation identified a range of areas which could be significantly strengthened and improved for minority and under-served communities.

These issues form the basis of the 10 key outcomes and supporting actions identified in this Strategy.

Consultation and engagement mechanisms

The Council will continue to ensure that equality is mainstreamed within the culture of the organisation through regular on-going consultation with local groups and individuals. There is a particular emphasis on including those individuals who would not necessarily take part in more traditional methods of ongoing consultation such as focus groups or who may be prevented from doing so because of their specific circumstances.

In order to interact meaningfully with these groups the Council has taken steps to enhance engagement by arranging events in venues which individuals find safe and accessible. It takes advice from local community groups on appropriate venues and locations. In addition, it recognises the importance of cultural sensitivity and avoids arranging meetings and events festivals on holy days. Language requirements are also taken into consideration and interpreters used, where necessary. Support is available to assist people to get involved. Printed material is available in audio and a range of font sizes and easy read versions for people with learning disabilities. Support is also in place to assist people to attend meetings such as the provision of British Sign Language Interpreters and hearing induction loops.

Communication mechanisms

In order to ensure that the Council can communicate effectively with all members of the community, it employs a range of measures, summarised below. However, it should be noted that one of the 10 key outcomes is to develop this area of work further and pilot a language and sensory register.

Translating Information

Some members of Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English. Therefore, copies of the Strategy, other major publications and important information will be available in other languages and alternative formats on request.

Gateshead has recently seen the arrival of significant numbers of asylum seekers. The Council has gathered information about the different asylum seeker languages that are spoken in Gateshead and this information has been used to determine the translation needs of this population.

The Council ensures that Black and Minority Ethnic Community Groups are aware of this service and monitors patterns of use of translated material.

Through the AIRS service (Access to Information and Reading Services), the Council can provide information on audiotape, in Braille and large print, in addition to specific languages. Information can also be made available in easy read formats for people with learning disabilities and poor literacy skills.

Using Interpreters

The Council ensures that resources are available to enable interpreters to be used for those members of Black and Minority Ethnic communities who have difficulty understanding English.

The Council uses the Newcastle Interpreting Service who are able to provide interpreters for both the established Black and Minority Ethnic and asylum seekers languages.

Language line is also used which provides direct telephone access to interpreters and enables three way conversations to take place in emergency situations, for enquiries or referrals, for confirming and making appointments as well as giving and receiving information.

The Council is developing a Corporate Guidance and Procedure Document to ensure that interpreting and translation services are consistently used where appropriate across the Council.

Addressing e-enablement and e-government

The Council is in the process of identifying ways in which its website can be used by members of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities by improving access to information and services from those people who have difficulty with English. It is intended that the website will allow users to access key welcome and introductory information including key contact information. The introductory information would also briefly explain the range of Council responsibilities.

Website users will also be given details of who to contact if they require a particular publication to be translated.

Extending access to services is a key element of 'Gateshead @ Your Service' the Council's Customer Service Strategy. Work to consult with Black and Minority Ethnic Communities will be undertaken through the implementation stage of the strategy to ensure their needs are addressed through the new and widened access channels.

Publicising the Strategy

Effective communication plays a key role in promoting equality and the implementation of the Strategy. The Council will ensure that elected members and employees are aware of the Strategy's content and implications. Elected Members are responsible for approving the Strategy and will receive a Members' Briefing outlining its content and implications.

The Strategy will also be made available in other formats including Braille, audiotape and large print. It will be available on request in identified Black and Minority Ethnic Languages including asylum seeker and refugee languages.

Members of the Equalities Working Group have responsibility for raising awareness about the Strategy with employees. Lead Officers have responsibility for disseminating information to their Groups and Services.

Employees will also be informed via our internal newsletter, namely, the Employee Briefing. In addition, a copy of the Strategy will also be available to all employees through our Intranet or on request from the Diversity Officer. New employees will receive a copy through induction.

The National and Strategic contexts

The National context

Over the last five years, the Government has embarked on a significant reform of equalities legislation, both in terms of service delivery and workforce management. This was partly in response to a number of incidents which highlighted the prevalence of institutionalized inequality in Britain - for instance, the Stephen Lawrence inquiry and the urban riots of 2001. As part of this reform, it has launched a range of initiatives and key documents, which set out its proposals for change and the implications for councils like Gateshead. Some of these are highlighted below:

- **The Equality Act 2006** - establishes a single Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) from October 2007, and a duty on public authorities to promote equality of opportunity between men and women (the 'gender duty'). It also makes discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in the provision of goods, facilities, services, premises, education and the exercise of public functions unlawful, and provides powers to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in the provision of goods, facilities and services.
- **The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)** - gives disabled people rights in a wide range of key areas such as employment, education, access to goods, facilities and services and buying or renting land or property. It requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people, and organisations to take reasonable steps to tackle physical features that act as a barrier to disabled people who want to access their services.
- **The Disability, Gender and Race Equality duties** - the duties impose broad obligations on public authorities to:
 - Eliminate discrimination and harassment;
 - Have due regard to the promotion of equality and opportunity between persons and other persons;
- **The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief)/(Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003** - this area of the law is applicable not only to the normal employer/employee context, but also to office holders, police, barristers and advocates, partnerships, trade organisations, qualifying bodies, providers of vocational training, employment agencies and higher education institutions. However, the Regulations do not apply to housing, education in its entirety, criminal justice or the supply of goods or services.
- **The Gender Recognition Act 2004** - allows transgender people (who are able to satisfy the necessary evidential requirements) to apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate, which provides full legal recognition of their acquired gender. Following a successful application, the law regards the transsexual person as being of their acquired gender, and ensures they have all the rights and responsibilities appropriate to that gender.
- **The Civil Partnership Act** - enables same sex partners who register as civil partners to be treated the same as a married couple for the purposes of social security benefits, child support and tax credits. Those who have not registered their partnership but have lived together as if they were civil partners are to be treated as heterosexual unmarried couples living together as husband and wife.

- **The Equalities Review** - which is jointly sponsored by the Equality Minister and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, will report to the Prime Minister in early 2007, and will:
 - Investigate the social, economic, cultural and other factors that limit or deny people the opportunity to make the best of their abilities
 - Provide an understanding of the long term and underlying causes of disadvantage that need to be addressed by public policy
 - Make practical recommendations on key policy priorities for: the government and public sector; employers and trade unions; civic society and the voluntary sector
 - Inform both the modernisation of equality legislation, towards a single equality act; and the development of the new commission for equality and human rights

These key initiatives and documents provide the framework for the main changes that the Council will need to make over the next few years. A full list of all legislation and guidance is included at Appendix 1.

The Equality Standard for Local Government

The Equality Standard for Local Government sets out a thorough and comprehensive framework for integrating equalities in service and workforce planning. In essence, the Standard requires that individual services take meaningful ownership of the equalities agenda, engage in dialogue with target groups and earmark specific resources in support of clear objectives.

The Council is working towards achieving level 5 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This means that it is continuously assessing all its policies, practices and procedures to determine if they have an adverse impact on the community. The Council is currently working within level 3 of the Equality Standard and is striving to reach level 5 by April 2009.

The Strategic context

The Council and partners' overall vision for Gateshead is set out in the Community Strategy and Towards 2010:

Local people realising their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead.

The Equality Strategy cuts across all key service areas and strategic documents, and will inform work in a number of priority areas, for instance, community safety, children and young people and transport planning.

Working with partners to achieve equality

The Gateshead Strategic Partnership (GSP) is made up of over 100 agencies and organisations from statutory, private, and voluntary and community sector organisations. Many of these organisations have either a statutory role or a keen interest in promoting disability equality. GSP partners played a key role in Gateshead's equalities consultation events, and are currently undertake equality needs analyses of their own.

Equality objectives can only be achieved by working in partnership with others. Partners will continue to have the opportunity to contribute to the Strategy to achieve common goals, and express their opinions and suggestions on the Strategy, including the outcomes and objectives identified.

The Council as an employer

The Council is a major employer and has a moral and legal responsibility to promote equality. In order to achieve this, our workforce needs to understand diversity and welcome the benefits it brings. One expression of this is our statement of Corporate Values. One of these is “embrace equality and value difference”.

Having the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time is key to the delivery of high quality services. A strategic approach to recruitment and positive action is essential. There is a growing acceptance of the benefits of a more diverse and integrated workforce and the importance of more responsive and flexible service delivery in combating social exclusion and building stronger communities. There are a number of issues in particular that need addressing across the Council such as:

- Addressing imbalance at senior management level.
- Matching the employment of people from minority or under-served communities with the local population.
- Improving the representation within the workforce, and narrowing the earnings gap between men and women.
- Monitoring and review the recruitment process and workforce profiles to identify shortcomings and take appropriate action where required.
- Consulting employees on all aspects of equality.
- Providing a work environment that is free from harassment and discrimination and respond quickly and effectively when it occurs.
- Ensuring that all employees and potential employees receive equal consideration and treatment and are not discriminated against during recruitment and selection because of their background or circumstances.

Some key areas of focus in relation to employment issues are dealt with in each appropriate section of the Strategy. It is also covered by the Council’s workforce strategy.

Equality and diversity training

The challenge of achieving cultural change in the workplace is ongoing. The Council has made progress in this area but there is more to do. To meet these challenges, elected members and employees require a particular set of skills, attitudes and knowledge.

Considerable effort has been made in delivering the Diversity and Equalities Training programme for all elected members and employees.

The purpose of the training has been to raise awareness about equality issues including race, disability, gender, age and sexual orientation. The Council is approaching the end of a two year programme of awareness-raising which has ensured a similar level of understanding across the Council in relation to equality issues.

The training has covered key legislation, Codes of Practice and obligations, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and employee roles and responsibilities.

More focussed equality training has been delivered to employees who are involved in the recruitment and selection process and all those employees who are involved in making decisions on recruitment and selection have received this training.

We will provide further training for all front-line employees who have contact with members of the public to ensure that they do not discriminate unlawfully against service users.

In order to support schools to carry out their responsibilities in relation to race equality, we have developed an e-learning package, as requested by them, which gives a grounding in equalities issues. This package can also be accessed by all Council employees and will be part of the induction process.

Member training

Elected Members require a particular set of skills, attitudes and knowledge and have a key role to play in ensuring that equality remains central to policy-making. This will be achieved in particular through the appointment of a Cabinet Member with an equalities remit and through the Corporate Vitality Advisory Group and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Elected Members are responsible for approving the Equality Strategy through the Cabinet process and will receive a Member’s Briefing outlining its content and implications.

The vision and 10 outcomes

The vision for Gateshead

“Local people realising their full potential, enjoying the best quality of life in a healthy, equal, safe, prosperous and sustainable Gateshead.”

This vision will be achieved through the following 10 outcomes:

1. Council employees who have a good awareness of the needs of residents from minority or under-served communities, and are proactive in ensuring appropriate support is in place.
2. Residents from minority or under-served communities who are aware of the key services and support networks available to them.
3. Residents with specific language or health needs who receive Council information in the appropriate format or language.
4. Residents from minority or under-served communities who feel safe and free from harassment, and can report incidents in the knowledge that issues will be handled sensitively and effectively.
5. Consultation that is directly targeted at the needs of individuals and communities.
6. Council information and promotional material that is representative of Gateshead’s different minority and under-served communities, and which promotes positive images.
7. Development of a ‘disability offer’, so that those with disabilities are offered a basic entitlement of services which they will be able to access in Gateshead. This will help to join services together and enable disabled people to pass between services safely and securely.
8. An accessible transport infrastructure, with easy access to major services.
9. Housing that supports independent living for disabled residents, and meets the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic residents, and faith communities.
10. Establishing and promoting an “Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual friendly” Gateshead.

Age

What do we mean by age?

The Council's approach to delivering services for younger and older people is dealt with in detail in two key documents, the Gateshead Children and Young People's Plan 2006, and the Gateshead Older People's Strategy. The section on age in this Strategy deals with age in terms of employment.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 come into force on 1 October 2006. They apply to employment and vocational training, and prohibit unjustified direct and indirect age discrimination, and all harassment and victimisation on grounds of age, of people of any age, young or old. The regulations (which will not affect the age at which people can claim their state pension) will:

- Ban age discrimination in terms of recruitment, promotion and training.
- Ban unjustified retirement ages of below 65.
- Remove the current age limit for unfair dismissal and redundancy rights.

They will also introduce:

- A right for employees to request working beyond retirement age and a duty on employers to consider that request.
- A new requirement for employers to give at least six months notice to employees about their intended retirement date so that individuals can plan better for retirement, and be confident that "retirement" is not being used as cover for unfair dismissal.

Despite receiving less publicity, and until now legislative consideration, than other areas of discrimination, ageism has been found to be the most common form of discrimination in the employment sector with an annual cost to the UK economy of approximately £31 billion. Misconceptions and stereotypes about the abilities of both young and older workers are widespread and influence many decisions in the workplace, including: recruitment; training; staff development; promotion and redundancy.

Age in Gateshead

The number of older people in England and Wales is increasing. In 2004, 22.8% of the population were over the age of 60; by 2024 this is expected to increase to 29.4% of the population. This projected increase in the number of older people will have significant implications for both Council and non-Council services in the future.

Mid-year population estimates for 2005 show that in Gateshead there are 68,300 people aged 50 or over. This is in line with the 2003 based population projections, which project that by 2028, there will be 78,200 people aged 50 or over.

What have we achieved so far?

On a local level, Gateshead has been approached by the Department of Work and Pensions to bid to become a pilot for 'LinkAge Plus'. LinkAge Plus aims to deliver significantly improved outcomes for older people through preventative services. Although flexible, LinkAge Plus proposals must involve older people in the design of the service, reflect the diversity of older people, be accessible to older people, and focus on promoting well-being and independence, going beyond health and social care. Each pilot will be evaluated to contribute to national findings. The implications of LinkAge Plus will need to influence the strategy within its two years of operation.

The Gateshead Strategic Partnership has been developing its Local Area Agreement (LAA) over the last year. Through the LAA, the Council and its partners will be given greater freedoms and flexibilities to explore local solutions to issues identified within the Community Strategy, whilst also contributing to national priorities and standards as set by central government. Gateshead's LAA has a particular focus on delivering better outcomes for older people and providing a range of high quality, flexible, accessible and supportive services that make a real difference. The work within the LAA around older people will also inform the development of the Strategy.

Age within the Council

The Council seeks to maintain a workforce that spans all ages of the working population. Recruitment campaigns and initiatives are designed to ensure that jobs are presented in a way that will attract applicants from all age groups. Policies and procedures have been designed to ensure that employees and potential employees are treated equally irrespective of age. The approach has been reinforced in line with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

What will we focus on over the next three years?

As regards the Council's workforce and age the focus over the next three years will be to:

- Monitor arrangements for the recruitment of employees and their treatment thereafter to ensure continuing compliance with the "age regulations".
- Seek to attract young people into the workforce to address demographic changes resulting from an ageing population.
- Encourage employees to work longer through new policies and procedures designed to encourage flexible working, flexible retirement and working beyond normal retirement age.

Disability

What do we mean by disability?

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines disability as 'physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities'.

This understanding of disability is enhanced by what is known as the 'Social Model' of disability, which recognises that disability occurs because barriers hinder disabled people from taking a full part in the community: 'The recognition that primarily it is the loss or limitation of opportunities, due to environmental and social barriers, that prevents people who have impairments from participating in society on an equal level with others.'

Disability in Gateshead

Out of a population of 191,500, 45,717 (23.9%) residents of Gateshead currently state that they have a disability or limiting long term illness. This compares to 22.7% for the North East overall (571,692), and 18.2% for the UK (9,484,856).¹

It is important to bear in mind however that currently, there is no single measure or estimate of disability. In addition, many people who may have permanent and specific health needs may choose for a range of reasons not to declare this.

A key challenge for the Council is to establish the diverse range of needs of people who have different types and levels of disability, and develop a much clearer picture of disability in the borough in order to establish a baseline of current performance and to set meaningful, challenging, but realistic performance improvement targets.

Since 2001 that there has been a decrease in the number of people in Gateshead who are economically inactive. However, there is still 16% of the working age population who are in receipt of sickness benefits such as incapacity benefit and severe disability allowance.

Building access and the built environment

The requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act allocates responsibility to service providers to ensure disabled people are not treated less favourably. It is recognised that where physical features in Council buildings seriously hinder access, it may be necessary to deliver a service through making alterations to buildings or equipment. However, the Council also recognises that making services accessible goes beyond the actual removal of physical barriers; sometimes it is more appropriate to focus on alternative ways of providing services looking at the needs of customers that have disabilities other than physical disabilities.

Auditing Council buildings

Access audits on Council public access buildings and schools began in 2002 with 200 buildings initially being identified. In addition, public access areas of residential buildings managed by The Gateshead Housing Company were also added to the programme including multi-storey flats, medium rise, low rise and community buildings, bringing the total to 472 units. By the time Part III requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 came in to effect in October 2004, the Council had largely completed all public access buildings and school audits and were well on the way with The Gateshead Housing Company schedule.

Following completion of access audits, each service provider has been responsible for completing Access Plans for their service. The purpose of the Access Plan is to outline a schedule of the required Disability Discrimination Act works and access management options derived from each of the audits. Within this, services have been considering wider solutions to accessibility rather than only focusing on physical barriers that affects those with physical disabilities. Services need to look at reasonable alternatives to making the service more accessible and providing it in a different way.

¹ Source: Census 2001

Gateshead's access planning process began in January 2005 with some services having completed their plans and others who are in the process of completing them. The Access Plans are a key tool in the planning process and for identifying key priorities in relation to accessible services. A key priority for the Council will be to ensure that each service completes its Access Plan and implements the measures within it over the duration of this Disability Equality Scheme.

Standards for new and existing buildings

All new Council buildings will comply with Part M of the Building Regulations 2000, as amended in 2003. The Council follows the guidelines for 'BS 8300 Design of Buildings' and uses this approach to help meet the needs of disabled people. It also works with the Gateshead Access Panel, an independent organisation that guides thinking on the process of inclusive design, services provided and physical barriers to access. The Council will ensure that all new buildings, designs and schemes consider the needs of disabled people from the onset and consult with user-led groups such as Gateshead Access Panel, Sight Service and Gateshead Deaf Forum.

What have we achieved so far?

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 introduced new measures to tackle discrimination against disabled people and extend disabled people's rights in a variety of areas such as employment, access to goods, facilities and services. The Council is required to introduce 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that all services are accessible to disabled people. Since the introduction of the Act, the Council has ensured that all newly constructed or altered Council facilities meet the DDA.

A full access audit of all Council buildings is now complete. The audit has indicated that only relatively few Council buildings are DDA compliant. The estimated cost of adapting all Council and The Gateshead Housing Company buildings to comply with the Act is approximately £50m. In view of this,

Groups are developing Access Plans, to explore options for providing services in alternative ways.

Approximately £1.5m has been identified to spend on physical improvements to buildings from January 2006 - services have been asked to bid for this money, and to demonstrate that they have explored all possible means of delivering alternative provision. In addition to the work on accessibility, a wide range of support is available to assist disabled employees. Recent successes include:

- Being awarded with the Positive About Disabled People Symbol by the Employment Service in April 2002. This shows that we have demonstrated our commitment to employing people with disabilities and welcome job applications;
- We participate in the 'Access to Work Scheme' which provides support to both those employees who are disabled when they start employment with the Council and those who become disabled during their employment;
- The Council application form and Job Shop Bulletin are available in Braille;
- Advertising vacancies in specifically directed publications, and guaranteeing interviews to disabled candidates who meet the essential criteria of the job.

Disability within the Council

Currently, 0.78% of Council employees have declared that they have a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Audit Commission compares this figure to the 23.9% of the economically active population of Gateshead that stated that they have "*.... an illness or disability that limits their daily activities or the work that they do*" as defined by the Census 2001.

Since the definitions are both different, the validity of comparing these two figures and the extent of the gap between the two figures is questionable. Despite this, the Council is committed to narrowing the employment gap by ensuring that it employs more people with disabilities. Recent achievements include:

Disabled Employment by Grade								
Grade	Manual 1-6	Scale 1-6	SO1-PO3	PO4-PO10	PO11-PO18	PO19-PO22	Teaching	Youth & Community
Total Disability	52	49	7	6	0	0	10	3
% Disability	0.40	0.36	0.10	0.04	0	0	0.10	0.02

The Council will continue to collate and publish information which includes a statistical representation of the numbers of successful disabled applicants. It has robust measures in place to ensure that appointing officers correctly record reasons for non-selection. This data is analysed to ascertain:

- How many applications are received from people who have identified themselves disabled;
- The success rates of disabled applicants;
- The composition of disabled employees in the overall workforce and in different Groups and Services;
- Whether there is a significant disparity between disabled employees in higher graded posts compared to the overall workforce; and
- Whether there are significant differences in the retention of disabled employees.

As part of the Council's recruitment procedures, all employees are offered exit interviews and reasons for leaving are recorded and monitored.

The Council has recently established a disabled employee forum, to examine employment issues and discuss proposals for improvement. So far, one meeting of the forum has taken place, which was very productive and attracted high attendance.

Support and training for disabled employees

All employees of the Council will have access to the same corporate training program and employees who attend learning and development events have the opportunity to request any special arrangements. Prior to undertaking any training, employees are informed that the following is available:

- Course material and joining instructions in large print and Braille;
- Sign language and interpreters;
- Modified chairs and equipment.

A training history of all employees is held on a computerised system for cross-referencing against personal details, which can then produce statistical reports.

Despite progress to date, the Council still has to make much further progress to meet its commitment to recruit and retain a workforce that continues to provide excellent services that reflects the community it serves. In particular it needs to ensure that it addresses the imbalance between the number of disabled employees at senior and lower grades and to match the local disabled population.

What will we focus on over the next three years?

1. We want to ensure that all our employees have a good awareness of the needs of disabled residents, and proactively offer appropriate support.
2. We want to increase awareness of the key services and support networks available to disabled residents.
3. We need to make sure that disabled residents receive Council information in the appropriate format or language.
4. We need to make sure that all disabled residents feel safe, free from harassment and discrimination in their homes and neighbourhoods, and confident that they can report incidents in the knowledge that their issues will be handled sensitively and effectively.
5. We need to make sure that consultation is directly targeted at the needs of disabled individuals.
6. We need to make sure that Council information and promotional material is representative of Gateshead's disabled community and promotes positive images.
7. We want to develop a 'disability offer', so that all disabled people are given an agreed multi-agency 'offer' or basic entitlement of services to help them pass between services safely and securely.
8. We need to continue to improve accessibility in the transport infrastructure.
9. We need to ensure our housing supports independent living for disabled residents.
10. We will continue to involve disabled service user and carer groups to inform inclusive design issues on all projects that affect the physical environment.

Gender and transgender

What do we mean by gender equality?

Women have the same rights as men, as both employees and consumers, and this is protected in a range of legislation and guidance. However, discrimination and oppression is still widespread, and there are major gaps in the parity of treatment women receive compared to men on a whole range of issues.

In addition to tackling discrimination against women, recent legislation and guidance has placed an increasing emphasis on tailoring services to address the specific needs and behavioural patterns of both men and women. It is important to note therefore that although women are a minority group facing clear and distinct issues, the needs of both women and men must be addressed overall.

Gender in Gateshead

There are currently more women living in Gateshead than men - 98,300 compared to 93,200. However, there are slightly more boys and young men in Gateshead than girls and young women - 23,540 compared to 22,768.

How does gender influence men and women's different experiences of services?

Crime

Men and women's fears and experiences of crime are very different. For example, Home Office statistics show that men worry most about car theft while women worry most about rape and personal attack.

One issue that has traditionally been ignored in government policy is domestic violence, despite the fact that it accounts for a quarter of all violent crime. It has the highest rate of re-offending of any type of crime and one in four women experience domestic violence at some time in their lives. Two women are killed each week by violent partners or by former partners.

Education

Gender stereotyping continues to have a significant impact on the education, performance and employment choices of boys and girls. For example, on average girls outperform boys at school but many continue to take jobs in traditionally low paid sectors.

Regeneration

Regeneration has had a significant impact on many communities over recent years and new investments in housing, transport, education, and employment have had a high profile. Little attention, however, has been paid to the different needs of men and women in communities affected by regeneration projects. While many women are members of local groups, men take the majority of decisions.

Social care

Although the majority of lone parents in Britain are women, some men are bringing up children alone or share responsibility with former partners. Stereotyping about parental roles can mean that men's different needs and experiences are overlooked when support services are designed.

Transport

Men and women make different use of public transport. They have different access to private transport, different patterns of commuting and employment, and different child-care and other family responsibilities. Women are the prime users of public transport, especially buses. Passenger surveys reveal differences in men's and women's attitude to and experience of public transport travel. They have different concerns, different preferences, different priorities.

There are a number of differences in the transport patterns of women and men, including a greater overall reliance on public transport and on walking by women (with the level of reliance on public transport found to be related to other factors, such as, for example, income, age, lone parenthood and disability). Women were also found to have a lower level of access to private transport, to have different purposes for trips and to make more “encumbered” journeys, and a higher level of taxi usage amongst women, particularly disabled women.

What have we achieved so far?

The Council was recently awarded the golden ‘Opportunity Now’ award for its work on gender in employment, achieving exceptionally high scores across most categories.

In addition, the Council secured £1.5m funding to set up a groundbreaking domestic violence project, with a view to developing new models of practice across the country. A domestic violence strategy has been developed and is now being implemented. Tackling violence against women is a key priority in the Gateshead Community Safety Strategy.

The Council has a comprehensive work/life balance policy in place.

Gateshead’s Gateshead Young Women’s Outreach Project provides support and learning for vulnerable young women, and young mothers and their partners.

As part of the Council’s work of the Equality Standard, a Fair Employment and Pay Policy has been produced and is being consulted on.

Some gender issues

Sexual equality in the workplace

Women make up nearly half of Britain’s workforce and the proportion is growing. The country has the highest workforce participation rate for women in Europe, with the exception of the Scandinavian countries. Girls and young women are excelling and outperforming boys in education, but this is not translating into earnings for many. Women are still working predominantly in lower paid areas, such as cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical work - which is one of the reasons why their full-time pay on average remains 18% less per hour than full-time men, 40% less if they work part-time. A key fact in this is their need to accommodate career interruptions through childbirth and care, and flexible working thereafter, into their careers.

Women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are three times less likely to be employed than white women. Given that over 90% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are Muslim, we are interested in particular obstacles facing Muslim women who wish to find paid employment. In addition, despite high levels of economic activity, Black Caribbean women face high levels of unemployment, and obstacles to progression - particularly at senior manager level.

Women whose routeways into work have been through higher education have broken through occupational barriers, which for many seemed insuperable a few generations ago. More women than men are now entering the professions of medicine and the law, demonstrating that the education system is able to facilitate gender equality. But, for many women there has been little significant change in recent years, with only 1% of women in construction and only 22 women enrolling for plumbing apprenticeships in England last year. The same is true for men, who make up only 2% of the childcare workforce.

Family friendly working

Parents want flexible working hours not reduced hours. However, where flexible practices are available, take-up is low. Employees perceive barriers to working flexibly and managers do not encourage it. Many believe it may adversely affect their career.

Return to work rates after pregnancy

At the moment, a third of mothers taking paid maternity leave from their jobs do not return after having a baby, because they cannot work the hours they want, or have childcare issues.

Transgender issues

Recent legislation has placed the issue of transsexualism firmly on the equalities agenda.

Transsexualism is a condition where a person has been assigned one gender (usually at birth on the basis of their external anatomy), but identifies as belonging to another gender, or does not conform with the gender role prescribed to them. It is also sometimes referred to as ‘gender identity dysphoria’ (GID), a psychiatric term. It should be noted though that many people identifying as transsexual will not have a diagnosed case of GID.

Increasingly, many interest and support groups now advocate the use of the adjective “trans” rather than transsexualism, on the grounds that it is less prescriptive, and less likely to imply a condition related to sexual orientation.

Transsexualism is not the same as cross-dressing for psychological comfort, sexual purposes or compulsions. Nor is it sexual orientation towards people of the same sex. Rather, trans people take decisive steps to live permanently in their acquired gender.

The gender recognition process

The process by which an individual formally transitions from one gender to another is referred to as 'the gender recognition process'. The gender recognition process is complex and lengthy, and involves assessment by a multi-disciplinary medical team - the Gender Recognition Panel. The Panel assesses applications from trans people for legal recognition of the gender in which they seek to live. Gender reassignment involves several key stages:

- Initial assessment
- Hormone therapy
- The 'real life' experience (RLE)²
- Surgical procedures as appropriate

If a transsexual person is successful in applying for gender recognition, and they are unmarried, they will get a full gender recognition certificate (GRC), and if their birth was registered in the UK they will be automatically entered on the Gender Recognition Register held by the Registrar General. Their original birth register entry will be marked, confidentially, to indicate that they have become recognised in their acquired gender.

They will then be able to marry a person of the opposite gender and be eligible for the state retirement pension and other benefits at the age appropriate to their new gender. If their birth has been registered in the UK they will receive a new birth certificate, in their acquired name and gender. Individuals who are married cannot receive a full GRC because marriage is not permitted between two members of the same sex. They may, however, apply to a Gender Recognition Panel for an interim GRC. This enables them to obtain a full GRC after their marriage is annulled, and provides a new ground for annulment to ease the process.

Key issues for trans people

- Discrimination, abuse and harassment - from colleagues or the public at large, before, during and after transition.
- Fear of insensitive, inappropriate social or health care - for example, genital screening can be intensely uncomfortable for many trans people, which can lead to a lack of gynaecological or prostate care.

- Anxiousness about the appropriateness of facilities - for instance, use of gender specific public toilets, or sports centre changing rooms.
- Employment - Because of abuse or harassment at work, many trans people feel compelled to leave, and trans people are statistically far more likely to be economically inactive.

What we will focus on over the next three years

1. We need to get better at marketing specific services at men and women, to encourage participation and take-up.
2. We need to get better at publicising specialised support services for women - e.g. women's advice services, domestic violence, counselling, particularly amongst Black and Minority Ethnic communities.
3. We need to improve feelings of safety and security for women when outside at night.
4. We need to continue to improve the public transport network, particularly links to health related services, and a reduction in waiting times between connecting services (especially at night).
5. Many parents want to see improvements in how bullying, particularly racist bullying, is dealt with in schools.
6. We need to make it clear through our policies and corporate culture that the Council is an organisation that recognises and supports the rights of trans people.
7. We will continue to talk with men and women people locally about what works and what does not, and be ready and willing to modify procedures to accommodate particular needs and issues, and publicise these.

² *The real life experience is a period of at least 12 months in which a person presents in their new gender for all purposes. During this time they will receive oestrogen or testosterone therapy, depending on whether they are a trans man or trans woman.*

The RLE is a required precursor for any referral for irreversible treatment. During RLE they must be a full time student or in work, change all documentation apart from birth certificate, and take part in an ordinary social life. A trans person will not be able to have any surgical procedure until they have satisfied at least two psychiatrists that they have adjusted well during this time.

Race, faith and religion

Race and faith in Gateshead

The borough has very low numbers of residents from diverse minority ethnic backgrounds. In 2001 only 1.6% of its residents fell into this category, most living in two wards - Bensham and Saltwell. The largest ethnic groups in Gateshead are the Mixed and Asian or Asian British groups, which both currently stand at 0.9%. The next largest is the Chinese group, at 0.3%. The Black or Black British and "other" groups are the smallest, at around 0.2%.³ More recently these numbers have been augmented by around 1,000 asylum seekers, representing a range of distinct languages and cultures.

At the moment, 2.4% of the 46,308 young people aged between 0 and 19 living in Gateshead borough are part of a minority ethnic group. Of Gateshead's 1000 asylum seekers, around 216 are school age children.

In addition, Gateshead has a large Orthodox Jewish community, also located in Bensham and Saltwell. These two wards became home to what is now one of the largest orthodox Jewish education complexes in post-war Europe following the destruction of many centres of Jewish scholarship during World War Two.

In recent times, Bensham and Saltwell have experienced significant deprivation, characterised by unemployment, an unskilled local labour pool and a predominantly rented housing stock. Prior to the settlement of the Orthodox Jewish Community, the non-Orthodox Jewish population was a disparate group of predominantly young adults and lone parents. The Jewish Community has been an important stabilising influence on the area, and a key factor in its continued regeneration. In addition, the presence of a large student body has had a positive impact on the local economy, and the community has been extremely successful in its work with the Council to secure funding for a wide range of restoration projects.

What have we achieved so far?

The Council recently participated in a bench-marking exercise carried out by 'Race For Opportunity', to help gauge its progress on programmes such as staff development for members of minority ethnic communities. The Council achieved the Gold Award for its work on racial equality.

The Council has enjoyed some real successes in its efforts to engage with diverse communities to ensure they have an opportunity to influence decision-making - for instance, regular meetings with the Jewish Community Council, and refugee and asylum seeker groups such as the Kurdish Community Association and Congolese Reflection Circle.

Consultation will take place with Black and Minority Ethnic community groups and individuals, using a range of consultation methods as appropriate to their needs. We have an established Diversity Forum, whose membership includes Black and Minority Ethnic community groups, individuals and organisations, who are working to benefit the lives of local Black and Minority Ethnic people.

Cabinet has recently approved a draft Travellers Policy, which sets out the Council's aims for improving outcomes for travellers and entitlement to services. The draft policy was the subject of very targeted, successful consultation with the traveling community.

The Council launched its multi-agency racist incident monitoring scheme in April 2004. The scheme enables partners to monitor, record and act on racial incidents and harassment.

An employment event was held at the Gateshead Muslim Society to encourage more people from the Black and Minority Ethnic communities to consider employment with the Council - this will be repeated in other community facilities to encourage people from 'under-represented' groups into the Council.

³ All data: Census 2001

The Council worked closely with Northumbria Police in setting up Gateshead's Independent Advisory Group which has become one of the more successful groups in the Tyne & Wear area.

In response to consultation with employees, the Council established a permanent 'peace room' a year ago, for employees to make use of during periods of religious or cultural significance.

Managing race equality through ethnic monitoring systems

The Council monitors existing employees and applicants for jobs, promotion and training by racial group. Monitoring by racial group is also undertaken on grievances, disciplinary action, performance appraisals and employees leaving the Council.

Ethnic monitoring is an essential means of collecting the data required to evaluate performance on achieving race equality objectives. Through effective monitoring the ultimate aim is to achieve a more diverse workforce, which reflects the local population.

In line with the specific duties contained within the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, arrangements are in place to ethnically monitor:

- Employees in post
- Applicants for jobs
- Applicants for training
- Internal applicants for promotion
- Outcomes of performance assessments, where there is a benefit or detriment
- Who is involved in grievances/disciplinary action
- Those who cease employment with the Council

The data is analysed for patterns of inequality and where unjustifiable patterns are revealed remedial action is taken. The data is analysed to ascertain:

- How many applications are received from different racial groups as a percentage of the relevant population we are recruiting from
- The success rates of applicants from different racial groups both for shortlisting and job offers
- The composition of Black and Minority Ethnic employees in the overall workforce and in different Groups and Services

- Whether there is a significant disparity between Black and Minority Ethnic employees and the overall workforce in the grade structure
- Whether there is a concentration of specific groups into particular areas of work
- Whether there is an absence of Black and Minority Ethnic employees in higher graded posts compared to the overall workforce
- Whether there are significant differences in the retention of Black and Minority Ethnic employees
- Whether there are significant differences based on gender between Black and Minority Ethnic employees and compared to the overall workforce

The Council will continue to ensure that the information is collated, published in the form of a workforce profile and analysed on an annual basis. Publication includes a statistical representation of Black and Minority Ethnic employees throughout the grade structure, both as a single group and by gender.

Positive Action initiatives

Where inequalities are revealed the Council will take remedial action to remove barriers and promote equality of opportunity. Race relation legislation allows for positive action measures whereby members from a particular under-represented group are either:

- Encouraged to apply for jobs, or
- Given training to help them develop their potential

Positive action has been taken to help address any imbalances by:

- Developing initiatives that target Black and Minority Ethnic employees to enable them to apply for particular positions e.g. specific training
- Using Black and Minority Ethnic support networks to publicise vacancies
- Encouraging Black and Minority Ethnic applicants in occupational areas where they are underrepresented
- Advertising vacancies in various publications and venues that reach Black and Minority Ethnic groups
- Advertising vacancies specifically directed at a particular Black and Minority Ethnic group

- Checking the response rates to advertisements to see whether fewer people from a particular group are applying

The Council is committed to further developing our system of ethnic monitoring to ensure it is robust and provides appropriate evidence to monitor our performance in relation to race equality.

What will we focus on over the next three years?

1. We want to ensure that all our employees have a good awareness of the needs of residents from Black, Minority Ethnic and faith communities, and proactively offer appropriate support.
2. We want to increase awareness of the key services and support networks available to Black, Minority Ethnic and faith communities.
3. We need to make sure that residents from Black, Minority Ethnic and faith communities receive Council information in the appropriate format or language.
4. We need to make sure that all residents from Black, Minority Ethnic or faith communities feel safe, free from harassment and discrimination in their homes and neighbourhoods, and confident that they can report incidents in the knowledge that their issues will be handled sensitively and effectively.
5. We need to make sure that consultation is directly targeted at the needs of residents from Black, Minority Ethnic or faith communities.
6. We need to make sure that Council information and promotional material is representative of Gateshead's different Black, Minority Ethnic and faith communities, and promotes positive images.
7. We want to make sure our housing meets the needs of Black, Minority Ethnic and faith communities, and supports community life.
8. We want to increase confidence in the Council, and other public agencies.
9. Build capacity to engage with the Council in its employment, service delivery, policy and decision making.
10. We need to ensure that Black, Minority Ethnic and faith communities are more aware of the employment opportunities the Council has to offer and are positive about their potential success in fulfilling those opportunities.

Sexual orientation

What do we mean by “sexual orientation”?

The phrase "sexual orientation" refers to the emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction an individual feels towards another person. People who identify as heterosexual are attracted towards partners of the opposite sex. People who identify as homosexual are attracted to partners of the same sex. Those who identify as bisexual are attracted to both men and women.

Today, the terms **gay** and **lesbian** are used today to describe women and men who seek same-sex partners. Although the term 'gay' is used to describe both women and men, it is mainly associated with men. Women are mainly referred to as lesbians.

Homophobia can manifest itself in a number of different forms. However, it is usually based on the belief that 'heterosexuality is the only normal, valid, and moral basis for partnerships'.

Lesbian, gay and bisexuality in Gateshead

The Government currently estimates that approximately 5-7% of the population is either gay, lesbian or bisexual. However, there is very limited data on the number of lesbians, gay men and bisexuals in the UK as no national census has ever asked people to define their sexuality.

Gateshead does have a small number of gay and lesbian communities. However, there is no obvious 'gay scene' in Gateshead, as opposed to Newcastle, which has a fairly vibrant and lively scene. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people report that safety in Gateshead is a real issue, and as a result have to exercise real caution about being openly demonstrative with their partner in public.

Lesbian, gay and bisexuality in the Council

Current national estimates indicate that less than 40% gay, lesbian or bisexual workers are openly 'out' at work, and only 1% are openly out to their

superiors. The Council now includes questions around sexual orientation as part of its workforce and recruitment monitoring process, and plans to develop this further so a clearer picture can be built.

Coming 'out' at work

Lesbian, gay and bisexual employees are now legally protected from discrimination in the workplace under the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003. However, the nature of the work environment has a huge impact on whether an employee has the confidence to 'come out' (tell other people about their sexual orientation) at work. Many employees chose to conceal their sexual orientation from colleagues, out of concern about possible harassment, or that it may present a barrier to career progression.

All Council services need to give consideration to how the work environment could be improved to provide a safe and supportive place for employees who might choose to 'come out'. The decision about whether or not to 'come out' is a difficult and ongoing decision process for many lesbian, gay and bisexual people. It involves continuously weighing-up the risks and benefits of telling people. This may include consideration of possible reactions and fear of detrimental effects on career advancement or career options. Not being 'out' at work can create additional stress and anxiety for employees in an already stressful job. If they fear a homophobic reaction, or that people will not be comfortable with their sexual orientation, they will edit what they disclose about their personal lives, partner, or even where they go and what they do in their social lives. This can lead eventually to feelings of isolation and maybe even withdrawal from the normal 'banter' which can occur in the workplace.

Clear messages from colleagues using gender-neutral terminology when enquiring about partners, and the efforts of people to demonstrate their lack of prejudice can be a huge relief and make 'coming out' much easier. Lack of prejudice can also be stated more formally through equal opportunities statements in adverts, contracts and policies.

Homophobia in education

It is clear from national evidence and Gateshead's recent consultation that homophobia in the education system is a very significant issue. Schools are a particular area of focus because, despite its repeal, Section 28 has left a legacy of fear about engaging meaningfully with the agenda. Homophobic bullying is an issue, and many teachers feel unable to come out for fear of the consequences or the reactions of pupils or parents.

What have we achieved so far?

The Council has begun to address this agenda in a number of ways. A multi-agency Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) Forum was established in February 2005. The Forum was set up to clarify the issues that affect LGB people in Gateshead, dispel myths, develop expertise and identify priorities for action. It includes representatives from statutory and voluntary agencies in Gateshead.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 came into force on 5 December 2005. The Act gave same-sex couples the opportunity to form a civil partnership and gain legal recognition of their relationship. Corporate Equality Group oversaw the process. To date, 19 civil ceremonies have taken place in Gateshead, and 79 notices received.

What will we focus on over the next three years?

1. We want to ensure that all our employees have a good awareness of the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual residents, and do not make assumptions about people's sexuality or lifestyle.
2. We need to ensure that Gateshead Council is an organisation where employees feel confident and comfortable to be out and be open about their sexuality.
3. We need to tackle homophobia and fear of engaging with the agenda in education.
4. We need to make sure that lesbian, gay and bisexual residents feel safe, free from harassment and discrimination in their homes and neighbourhoods, and confident that they can report incidents in the knowledge that their issues will be handled sensitively and effectively.
5. We need to make sure that consultation is directly targeted at the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual residents.
6. We need to make sure that Council information and promotional material recognises Gateshead lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and promotes positive images.
7. We want to make sure our housing meets the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and supports community life.

Performance and review

Assessing performance on the Equality Strategy

We will review and monitor the effectiveness of the Equality Strategy on an annual basis. Overall responsibility will lie with the Corporate Equality Group, and ultimately, the Chief Executive, in liaison with the Strategic Director, Legal and Corporate Services. The review will include an assessment of how the Council has complied with the general and specific equality duties, how policies and functions have been revised in light of the impact assessment exercise and progress on specific actions.

In addition, residents and employee forums will play a key role in challenging progress against targets and making suggestions for improvements.

Measuring performance on equalities across the Council

Progress against equalities objectives is assessed through a series of measures including:

- Six monthly service improvement reports
- Public satisfaction with services
- The achievement of challenging and smart targets
- Percentage of key Performance Indicators and non-key Performance Indicators in the top quartile of performance
- External validation of our performance
- Management appraisals (pending)
- Continuous appraisal with partners, i.e. through the Local Area Agreement

Service plans are produced for each service on an annual basis. They cover a three-year planning period and are published in April each year. The role of service plans in identifying equalities priorities/assessing performance against them is fundamental to achievement of equality and the continuous improvement of services.

Role of Members

Members have a key role to play in ensuring that equality remains at the centre of decision making. This is achieved in a number of ways but in particular through Cabinet Members holding Equality Portfolios, the operation of the Corporate Vitality Advisory Group and Corporate Vitality Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Council's Equality and Diversity Team

The Equalities Team is responsible for delivering the Council's strategic equalities and diversity agenda, with a specific remit for community cohesion, race, disability, gender, sexual and age equality. It also:

- Provides the corporate lead on implementation of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
- Leads on the development and implementation of Gateshead's Equality Strategy, Community Cohesion Strategy, and the Equality Charter.
- Leads on the development and monitoring of equalities outcomes, objectives and targets corporately and across services.
- Ensures compliance with equalities legislation and guidance.
- Designs and undertakes ongoing consultation with Members, stakeholders, service users, minority and hard-to-reach groups and employees on equalities issues.
- Operates the racist incident reporting scheme.
- Responds to consultation from the Government in relation to Equality issues.
- Develops capacity amongst Black and Minority Ethnic, faith communities and refugee and asylum seeker organisations, women's groups and disabled groups and fosters joint work amongst these organisations and the Council.
- Ensures that the equality training programme is delivered effectively and meets the needs of Council employees.

Appendix 1

List of equalities legislation

The Council's Equality and Diversity Policy has been devised subject to the recognition that employment practices and service delivery comply with the following Equal Opportunities Legislation, Codes of Practice and recommendations:

- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Gender Equality Duty
- The Equal Pay Act 1970 as amended by the Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983
- Codes of Practice, including on Equal Pay
- The Race Relations Act 1976
- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- Five Year Plan for Asylum and Immigration
- Incitement to Religious Hatred Act (1986 Public Order Act)
- The Macpherson Recommendations, Stephen Lawrence Inquiry
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) Act 1999
- Disability Equality Duty
- Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001
- Equal Opportunities Commission and Commission for Racial Equality Codes of Practices
- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- Equality Standard for Local Government

Appendix 2

The Disability Discrimination Act - Definition of Disability

What the Act means by disability

Disability is defined as: "A physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities."

Explanations of:

Impairment

The definition covers physical and mental impairments. These include:

- Physical impairments affecting the senses, such as sight and hearing
- Mental impairments including learning disabilities and mental illness (if it is recognised by a respected body of medical opinion)

Substantial

For an effect to be substantial, it must be more than minor.

The following are examples that are likely to be considered substantial:

- Inability to see moving traffic clearly enough to cross a road safely
- Inability to turn taps or knobs
- Inability to remember and relay a simple message correctly

Long-term

These are effects that:

- Have lasted at least 12 months
or
- Are likely to last at least 12 months
or
- Are likely to last for the rest of the life of the person affected

Long-term effects include those that are likely to recur. For example, an effect will be considered to be long-term if it is likely both to recur, and to do so at least once beyond the 12-month period following the first occurrence.

Day-to-day activities

Day-to-day activities are normal activities carried out by most people on a regular basis, and must involve one of the following broad categories:

- Mobility - moving from place to place
- Manual dexterity - for example, use of the hands
- Physical co-ordination
- Continence
- The ability to lift, carry or move ordinary objects
- Speech, hearing or eyesight
- Memory, or ability to concentrate, learn or understand
- Being able to recognise physical danger

Particular cases or conditions:

Severe disfigurements

The Act's definition treats severe disfigurements as disabilities, although they have no effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

If, however, the disfigurement consists of a tattoo which has not been removed, non-medical body piercing, or an object attached through such a piercing, regulations have the effect of ensuring that this would not be treated as a disability.

Impairments helped by treatment or artificial aids

Medication or equipment (such as an artificial limb), which helps impairment, is not taken into account when considering whether impairment has a substantial effect.

For example, a person who wears a hearing aid to improve their hearing is considered to have the hearing loss that would exist without the use of the aid. An exception is when people wear glasses or contact lenses - it is the effect on the person's vision, while wearing their glasses or contact lenses that is considered.

If, however, the treatment is likely to cure the impairment, this should be taken into account in assessing whether the impairment is long-term.

Progressive conditions

The Act covers progressive conditions where impairments are likely to become substantial. Examples of progressive conditions include

- Cancer
- HIV infection
- Multiple sclerosis
- Muscular dystrophy

The Act covers people with these conditions from the moment that there is a noticeable effect on normal day-to-day activities, however slight.

For example, a person with multiple sclerosis would be covered from the time they first developed symptoms that affect their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. They would not be covered just because the illness had been diagnosed.

Genetic predispositions

The Act does not cover people with a gene that causes a disability unless they develop the disability. For example, people with the gene that causes Huntington's chorea are not covered if they do not have the condition. People are covered as soon as the first effects on normal day-to-day activities appear.

Past disabilities

The definition covers people who have had a disability in the past. If a person once had a disability, which is covered by the Act, they are still protected if they have recovered. This applies even if they recovered before the Act came into force.

Registered disabled people

Any person registered as a disabled person under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, or the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act (Northern Ireland) 1945, on both:

- 12 January 1995 when the legislation was first introduced into Parliament
- and the date when the employment rights start is covered by the Act for three years

is to be treated as having a disability, for the purposes of the Act, for three years from the latter date. They do not have to prove they meet the new definition of disability for this three-year period.

Babies and children under the age of six

It may be difficult to see the effects of an impairment on a baby or young child and thus determine if he or she is disabled. However, a young child with an impairment will be treated as disabled under the Act if someone over the age of six with such an impairment would normally be covered by the Act.

Impairments which are excluded

The following conditions are not to be treated as impairments for the purposes of the Act:

- Addiction to or dependency on alcohol, nicotine or any other substance (unless the addiction resulted from the substance being medically prescribed)
- Seasonal allergic rhinitis (e.g. hay fever) except where it aggravates the effect of another condition
- A tendency to set fires
- A tendency to steal
- A tendency to physically or sexually abuse of others
- Exhibitionism
- Voyeurism



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