

Draft Race Equality Scheme 2008 - 20011

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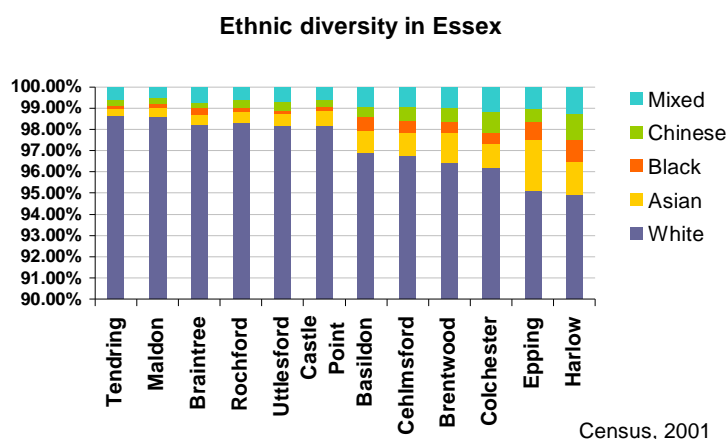
1. Introduction

Our first Race Equality Scheme covered the period 2005 to 2008. A review of that document has now taken place, providing an opportunity to reflect on our achievements over the last three years, and areas for development in the future. The result of that process is the production of this, our second Race Equality Scheme covering the period 2008 to 2011, and the updating of our Corporate Equality Action Plan which sets out the principal corporate actions we intend to take in order to further the development of equal opportunities in our District.

2. A district of diversity

Our community's ethnic profile

Epping Forest is a district of diversity. Located in Essex on the border with London, our Community is composed of a varied mix of suburban and rural areas. The Council has therefore long since recognised and sought to address the challenges of providing equitable service provision to customers and users who lead very diverse lifestyles, living in very different physical environments. The Council uses this experience of providing services to a varied array of people, to forward its equalities agenda.



As with the geography of the District, our community is composed of a diverse racial and cultural mix. Amongst district councils, Epping Forest houses significant Asian and Traveller communities in Essex, (albeit that the overall numbers are relatively low) with the second largest black population and overall diversity mix. As an employer, the Council has the most ethnically diverse workforce of any district in Essex, although again the overall numbers are relatively low.

It is in this context, as a geographically and culturally diverse district, that Epping Forest District Council aims to forward equalities in our District.

Our vision and commitment to race equality

We want Epping Forest District Council to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of the diverse communities that we serve, and to provide facilities and services that are free from unlawful discrimination. Epping Forest District Council is therefore committed to providing services to the community which reflect the needs and diversity of all its customers and service users. We recognise that discrimination in society exists, and seek to provide services fairly and equitably to all to redress this.

With this recognition in mind, the Council understands its position as a large provider of services and employment opportunities within the District, and in this position, its commensurate role in the Community. Therefore all services provided either directly by the Council, its contractors, partners or related agencies are covered by this commitment, as are all permanent, temporary and casual employees and all job applicants.

It is our commitment to promote equality of provision in council services and equal treatment to all service users, employees and job applicants within the framework of the law and without reference (where appropriate) to race, ethnic origin, nationality, political or religious beliefs, HIV status, disability, gender, sexual orientation, age or marital status.

We want to celebrate diversity and the richness that this brings to our community.

The importance of our Race Equality Scheme

Our Scheme is the primary strategic document on race equality for all of the policies and functions that Epping Forest District Council delivers. It codifies service users' rights, the Council's duties and through providing overarching mechanisms, it sets out actions that the Council will undertake to make it possible to provide services in an equitable way.

Linking-in with and expanding upon our corporate objectives, made within the Council's Corporate Equalities Action Plan, our revised Race Equality Scheme provides the direction required for the Council to comply with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RR(A)A), and to take forward our ambition to promote equality of opportunity for all within the District.

This revised Race Equality Scheme replaces its predecessor, published in 2004/5. The revisions made in this Scheme will review the improvements that have been made since adopting our first Race Equality Scheme, outline our ambitions to promote equality of opportunity, as well as set in place a workable action plan to improve, monitor and evaluate the Council's effectiveness in meeting the requirements of the specific and general duties.

This Scheme is intended to be analytical, dynamic, adaptable to organisational change, and will be regularly reviewed and updated every three years, with annual reports on progress made available to the public.

3. The Council's duty as a public body

The Macpherson Report was written as a result of the public inquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence. The Report highlighted the problem of 'institutional racism', and that public bodies can both wittingly and unwittingly treat their service users differently due to their race or ethnicity. Institutional racism was therefore defined as the:

"Collective failure of an organisation to offer a professional and appropriate service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen in processes, practices, attitudes and behaviour, which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping, which disadvantage minority communities" (Paragraph 6.34, Stephen Lawrence Inquiry).

Contained within this Inquiry are seventy recommendations covering racial harassment, openness, discrimination, accountability, recruitment and selection, as well as other concerns. Some of these recommendations have been made law in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, including the duty for public services to have a Race Equality Scheme.

The Act places a **general statutory duty** on a wide range of public authorities to positively promote race equality in service delivery and employment, in order to prevent any deliberate or unwitting racial or ethnic discrimination. It also provides the Home Secretary with the power to impose a range of **specific duties** that are deemed necessary to assist authorities in the fulfilment of the general duty.

The Commission for Racial Equality has powers of enforcement over general and specific duties and is able to issue statutory codes of practice providing practical guidance to public authorities on how to fulfil the duties.

The scope of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act covers the authority in its role as:

- An employer
- A provider of services
- An agent of procurement
- A partner

It is therefore unlawful for authorities to discriminate on racial grounds, whether this is direct or indirect discrimination, while carrying out any of these functions.

The general duty

The general duty is a 'positive' one. That is, the Council is obliged to take positive action for improvement. The Act specifies that public authorities must fulfil their general duty to promote race equality by ensuring that all actions, where their outcome may have negative impacts according to race or ethnicity, must:

- Eliminate unlawful racial and ethnic discrimination
- Promote equality of opportunity, and
- Promote good relations between persons of different racial and ethnic groups

Under the general duty the Council is required to define its functions – what it is that we do – and assess the impact that our activities or proposed activities have on racial equality, to decide whether our functions facilitate positive or negative outcomes.

Where current or proposed policies are demonstrated to have a negative impact on the elimination of racial discrimination, the promotion of racial equality or good race relations, the Council is expected to consider how that policy should be changed to counteract this.

The necessary changes then need to be made to ensure that in the long term, everything we do has a positive impact and is therefore assisting us in fulfilling our commitment to equality.

The specific duties

The specific duties have been designed as practical tools to assist public bodies to fulfil the general duty.

The specific duties require all public authorities to publish a Race Equality Scheme. This report therefore reviews the outcomes of our current Race Equality Scheme, ensures that the Council is compliant with the RR(A)A, and highlights what the Council intends to include in its future Race Equality Scheme.

The Council recognises that our current and future Race Equality Schemes must:

- Identify which of the Council's functions are relevant to the fulfilment of the general duty
- Set out arrangements for how we will assess our policies to determine the affect they have on race equality
- Set out how we will let people know about the results of our assessments, and any consultation and or monitoring exercises that we do
- Set out how we will ensure Council services are equally accessible to all
- Set out our arrangements for training staff on issues relevant to race equality

The employment duty

As a public body bound by the general duty, the Council is also subject to the employment duty, a specific duty which outlines the Council's responsibility to monitor employees by racial group. To fulfil our obligations as an employer, the Council agrees to complete the following actions:

- Produce and collate ethnic minority data relating to staff in post, applications for employment, training and promotion, staff in receipt of training, outcomes of performance assessment procedures, staff involved in grievance or disciplinary procedure and staff in employment.
- Publish the results of this monitoring on an annual basis
- Analyse the data to establish any patterns of inequality
- Take necessary action to identify and remove barriers and promote equality of opportunity

The purpose of this monitoring is not intended to be passive record keeping. Its objective is to provide data that the Council can actively utilise to regularly assess that the general duty is being met in exercising employment functions. The above monitoring information provides an indicator of:

- The existence of negative outcomes for ethnic minority staff and applicants
- Ways to remove any unfairness, disadvantage or possible discrimination identified

In this report, we intend to clarify our arrangements for fulfilling these requirements. This report therefore sets out our approach to the general and specific duties over the past three year period, and demonstrates the progress we have made.

4. Review of our progress

Performance indicators and improvement between 2005-2007

Performance indicators are government defined and audited measures that the Council is required to calculate and publish each year. These enable the Council to monitor its progress over time on a wide range of issues within the District.

In our first Race Equality Scheme, we identified a number of performance indicators that we would monitor in order to give direction on policies whose objective was to promote equality of opportunity for ethnic minority customers and service users.

These indicators were identified because they measure delivery outcomes and improvement in a number of key areas:

- The Council's compliance with the Equality Standard for local government
- The Council's duty to promote equality
- The Proportion of ethnic minorities in senior management
- The ethnic composition of the workforce
- Satisfaction with the Council as a landlord
- The Council's compliance with the Code of Practice for social landlords
- The number of racially-motivated incidents of crime recorded
- The percentage of racially-motivated incidents resulting in further action

Since the implementation of the Council's Race Equality Scheme, we have witnessed an improvement in many of these areas when responding to the needs of our staff and service users. Details of this are included in Appendix One to this document 'Monitoring our Equality Duties 2007/08'.

The Council as an equitable employer

As an employer, the Council is committed to hiring staff based on their skills and talents as potential employees, while at the same time ensuring that our hiring practices do not deter or discriminate. To ensure that the latter is not the outcome, the Council uses the employment duty to monitor and analyse the ethnic profile of our workforce. This assists us in identifying areas that require improving and what impact policies to tackle inequality are having.

The employment duty requires public bodies to collate and publish ethnic minority data relating to a number of areas, such as: numbers of staff in post, applications for employment, training and promotion, staff in receipt of training, outcomes of performance assessment procedures, staff involved in grievance or disciplinary procedure and staff in employment.

At present, the ethnic origin of all staff is monitored digitally by a shared Human Resources and Payroll monitoring system. This shared system offers an effective means for the Council to identify trends between ethnic origin, job role, seniority and salary, in order to determine the existence of any employment segregation or ethnic penalty. Details of our performance are included in Appendix One.

Training and staff development

The Code of Practice for the RR(A)A directs local authorities towards ensuring that the staff responsible for meeting the general and specific duties are aware of their responsibilities and have the skills to carry them out. This requirement includes the duty for the Council to consider what degree of training staff will require on the general and specific duties, and that training should be relevant to job function and seniority.

The Council recognised early on, that these requirements for equality training represented a corporate training need, and that it was not sufficient to rely on individual staff appraisals or service level plans to take forward this type of training. The Council has therefore made equality and diversity training mandatory for all posts, as the Council seeks to prevent the situation where the lack of such knowledge or skills could lead to instances of unlawful discrimination, or perceived discrimination by ethnic minority staff and service users.

This approach was welcomed by service managers, who indicated their support for an enhanced programme of equality training during the Council's first cycle of impact assessments in 2004. Resources for this training have been successfully allocated and training has been completed by the vast majority of staff, tailored according to seniority within the organisation and across a wide array of specialised job functions.

Monitoring data on this training is collected via the number of applications for training, turnout and through individual satisfaction appraisals of the course content, which includes an equal opportunities questionnaire for all attendees. This information is held digitally by the Human Resources unit, and the outcomes of such data have been used in the formation of this revised Race Equality Scheme.

In addition to mandatory equality training, courses designed to address general management and staffing issues are also mindful of equality and diversity issues. Examples of two courses in which this approach is evident is in training relating to Managing Absence and Workplace Harassment and Bullying. In all courses, as with these examples, the Council's Learning and Development Advisor ensures linkages of this nature through the procurement of bespoke EFDC-focused training, whose content can be adapted to forward the Council's equality objectives, rather than purchasing 'off the shelf' solutions. Details are included in Appendix One.

5. Improving the effectiveness of our Race Equality Scheme

Shared ownership for the race equality Scheme

All employees are expected to contribute to the achievement of our equalities objectives and the Council will ensure that individuals are aware of their personal and professional responsibility to support equal opportunities, both corporately and also in service delivery.

To ensure adherence to our commitment to equal opportunities, managers and supervisors will be expected to:

- Assist in the development and implementation of equal opportunities action plans and the impact assessment process within their service areas

- Review the effectiveness of policies and functions designed to promote equal opportunities, review all related action plans and communicate their findings to senior management
- Ensure that within their areas of responsibility, the standards established by this document and other related policies such as those on harassment are followed

The Council expects that all employees will:

- Not harass, abuse, or intimidate others on account of their race, gender, age etc
- Co-operate with any measures introduced to ensure equal opportunity
- Report any suspected discriminatory acts or practices
- Not persuade or attempt to persuade others to practice unlawful discrimination
- Not victimise others for reporting or providing evidence of discrimination
- Not lobby job applicants in an attempt to discourage them from applying for or accepting a particular job

Breaches of these provisions may result in disciplinary action being taken against an individual.

Meeting the employment duty

Through its Race Equality Scheme, the Council's Human Resources unit has taken its lead from the employment duty, whose objective is to eliminate the ethnic penalty that some employees may face on the grounds of their skin colour, place of birth and religious or cultural beliefs and practices. In monitoring key areas where inequality is likely to be evident, a primary factor in eliminating employment barriers is through the Council being aware of the changing ethnic profile and perceptions of our workforce.

This awareness is critical to identifying the existence of negative consequences, formed as a result of the Council's policies or functions. Where these policies are proven to have a direct or indirect negative impact on ethnic minority users, the Council will attempt to alter the policy or look for alternatives that do not discriminate.

To meet this objective, the Council will continue to:

- Monitor the ethnic profile of data relating to staff in post, applications for employment, training and promotion, staff in receipt of training, outcomes of performance assessment procedures, staff involved in grievance or disciplinary procedure and staff in employment
- Conduct qualitative and quantitative research relating to equal opportunities in employment
- Analyse, report on and publish the findings of data collected on an annual basis
- Create targets and corresponding actions to ensure that ethnic minority staff receive equal training and development opportunities
- Commit to reviewing policy and practices that are identified as unlawfully discriminative to ethnic minority staff

Staff development and training

Key to the success of our revised Race Equality Scheme, are the staff who will be delivering our equality agenda. It is therefore essential that we continue to provide an

effective, informative and on-going programme of training and guidance that is reactive to:

- New employment legislation
- New or changed policies, procedures and practices, including guidance on carrying out impact assessments, monitoring data, consulting with stakeholders, challenging discrimination, dealing with harassment and fair recruitment and selection
- Identifying training needs detected through observation of poor performance via performance monitoring data, but also through the findings of impact assessments, complaints and harassment issues

Some of these require attendance at formal training sessions and some can be dealt with via other means such as the circulation of written guidance or cascaded via team briefings. The Council is committed to the general principle that every employee should attend some form of formal equality and diversity training, especially where skills need to be developed to provide equally accessible services. Therefore, in addition to the provision of mandatory equality training, the Council will also seek to:

- Periodically remind all managers and employees of the Council's aims and equality targets, and how well it is achieving them through performance monitoring data
- Provide guidance on new topics or interpretations of equality legislation, and to ensure that these are communicated
- Mainstream its equality training. Since equality is a cross-cutting issue, the need to promote equality should also be included in the brief for all other training topics where this could be relevant

Member training

The Council will seek to continue its training programme for members, including:

- Equality and diversity issues as appropriate to the training for new and existing members
- Fair recruitment and selection practices for members involved in senior appointments
- Understanding how members' decisions could have a unintended impact on the needs of individuals with different cultural or religious needs.

Work-related harassment and bullying

The Council is committed to creating a working environment where employees do not suffer harassment or bullying on any grounds, specifically their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age or religion. We believe all employees have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, and have an equal responsibility to treat colleagues and members of the public in the same manner. To this end we have introduced a Violence at Work Policy and are currently reviewing our Harassment and Bullying Procedure.

Shared ownership for the employment duty

All employees are expected to contribute to the achievement of our equalities objectives and the Council will ensure that individuals are aware of their personal and

professional responsibility to support equal opportunities, both corporately and also in service delivery.

The Council will therefore seek to:

- Uphold the provisions made in its harassment and bullying policy
- Monitor ethnic data relating to the indicators required under the employment duty
- Publish the number and ethnic composition of these indicators annually in a report to Management Board, via the Council's website and in print on request by individuals

To ensure adherence to our commitment to the employment duty, managers and supervisors will be expected to:

- Assist in the development and implementation of equal opportunities action plans and the impact assessment process within their service areas
- Review the effectiveness of policies and functions designed to promote equal opportunities, review all related action plans and communicate their findings to senior management
- Ensure that within their areas of responsibility, the standards established by this document and other related policies such as those on harassment are followed

In addition to managers' commitment, the Council also expects that all employees will:

- Co-operate with any measures introduced to ensure equal opportunity
- Report any suspected discriminatory acts or practices
- Not persuade or attempt to persuade others to practice unlawful discrimination
- Not victimise others for reporting or providing evidence of discrimination
- Not harass, abuse, or intimidate others on account of their race, gender, age etc
- Not lobby job applicants in an attempt to discourage them from applying for or accepting a particular job

6. Impact assessment and ethnic monitoring

Identifying relevant functions and policies

In 2003 we carried out an exercise to identify all of the Council's key services, assess these for any negative impacts for those with ethnic minority backgrounds, and to determine which are relevant to enable us to fulfil the general and specific duties. In doing this we recognised that we needed to know what functions/policies would present barriers to equality for our users and employees, and what functions/policies provide us with the best opportunities to make improvements in our commitment to promote equality.

To determine what services were of relevance, we assessed them against the following criteria:

- What parts of the general and specific duties applied to the service? Did the service have the potential to:

- a) Eliminate Discrimination?
 - b) Promote Equality of Opportunity?
 - c) Promote Good Race Relations?
- Was there any potential for different ethnic groups to be negatively affected when they come into contact with the service or the outcomes of a policy?
 - Was there any evidence of public concern that there were differences in outcomes for different ethnic groups, when they come into contact with the service?

All of the Council's relevant functions and policies were identified and prioritised. Those given highest priority were key public services and policies that directly interface, or regulate interaction with customers – both externally and internally. They may also be services where we identify the most need for improvement to meet our equalities objectives.

The highest priority services were looked at first to assess the impact of the services' policies on race equality. Our list of prioritised Services is attached at Appendix Two. Our table of completed Impact Assessments together with review dates is set out at Appendix Three. Currently all required Impact Assessments are completed.

Assessing for impact

Where we identified problems or believed a policy could be altered to have a more positive impact, we put in place arrangement to amend the policy or take other appropriate actions.

To aid this process, the Council has used feedback from the previous cycle of impact assessments, conducted in 2004/05 to re-develop its Impact Assessment Tool. This aims to draw out more detailed information on the likelihood of negative affects existing, and also for whom. This Tool is now being used in the Council's next cycle of impact assessments, including assessments of new functions or policies.

The following issues are being considered during the re-assessment of functions or policies:

- What is the intention of the policy and who is responsible for it?
- Who are the potential users of the services to which the policy relates and how has the policy been adapted to take their needs into account?
- Who are the target groups for the policy and what other groups are affected by it?
- What consultation has taken place with the local community about the policy?
- Does the policy assist the council in meeting the general duty to: promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and positively influence race relations?
- The monitoring that takes place of the views of service users.
- How are services accessed and do some groups have difficulties relating to access?
- Can either direct or indirect discrimination be identified in the policy or the way in which it is delivered?
- Could any adjustments be made to the policy to overcome any aspects of it that present barriers to service users?

After policies have been assessed, services will be expected to update their action plans detailing how they are going to amend their policies, and the way they are delivered, to overcome any identified negative impacts on race equality. These action plans will be scrutinised on an annual basis.

As noted above, these processes will not only apply to existing policies of the relevant services. The same questions will be asked of any new policies that Directorates are intending to implement. This will assist race equality to become an automatic consideration in the development of our services. The results of impact assessments will be published when completed via the Council's website, and in print upon individual request.

We intend that the end result of this process will be to "mainstream" the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity and good race relations, by making these key considerations in the development of our policies and how we deliver them. We will continue to provide the services we do at present, but will do so in a way that takes due regard of the needs of all those who live within the district.

Assessment of the Council's new functions and policies

The results of impact assessments are built into reviews of both existing and new policy development. Where negative impacts have been found to exist, these will be published in committee reports that make recommendations for amendment to existing policies or the creation of new ones.

7. Monitoring

When assessing policies and functions each service must go through a process of reassessment every three years. Between this period, policies identified as posing either a negative impact or a potential one for race equality and the other parts of the general duty, must be monitored through the collection of appropriate data and consultation exercises.

Management Board agreed an Equality Monitoring Policy and Procedure in December 2007 which ensures that appropriate monitoring information is captured on a consistent basis, mindful of Data Protection requirements. Directors are now considering which elements of their service should be monitored. The Equality Monitoring Policy is attached at Appendix Four.

The existing monitoring data, gathered between the last series of impact assessments and this revised Race Equality Scheme, has been used to inform the current impact assessment process. This has led to a re-development of our Impact Assessment Tool, to gain more insight into the potential for negative impacts. It is important we collect information that can be compared over time to ensure that we can register noticeable improvements in the service we provide.

We are also committed to monitoring the demographic make-up of our District, so we have a clear idea of the diversity of needs that exist, and have a commensurate commitment to monitoring the views of our service users, so we can identify levels of dissatisfaction and respond to these. In order to do this, the Council will conduct customer satisfaction surveys, partnering with other Essex district councils to compare performance. Although the statutory requirement for this is 3 years, Epping Forest District Council will be conducting these annually, as part of our drive to understand our District in greater detail.

Data-driven decision-making

The Census 2001 contains a wealth of information concerning the demographics of the Council's ethnic minority communities. However, much of this information will be 8 years old by the time this Race Equality Scheme is published. While this data can reveal the ethnic profile of the District, this information alone is not sufficient to ensure our policies and functions support all of our communities.

The Council is keen to generate its own data, both through the use of national statistics, consultation and systems monitoring. This information is key to creating and ensuring that policies and functions that the Council is responsible for do not adversely affect those we are charged with serving.

8. Consultation process and findings

Why consult?

Consultation can help the Council to make better more informed policy and service decisions. This is because:

- Consultation allows the Council to gain information directly from stakeholders and the public. This can provide an additional context to a policy proposal, check the Council's assumptions, generate new ideas and provide a broader view than Council officers might otherwise be able to provide.
- The consultation process encourages thorough project planning, early input from stakeholders and careful consideration of all available options.
- Consultation highlights potential problems early on, and allows the Council to remedy these through better policy-making and service delivery.

Consultation is also effective in increasing trust and engagement with our stakeholders. This is because consultation:

- Promotes transparency and accountability
- Improves awareness and understanding of the policy or service area and can address uninformed public/stakeholder assumptions
- Encourages public ownership of the policy, therefore increasing public commitment to it

It is the policy of Epping Forest District Council to consult with the people who are affected by the decisions we make and use the services we provide. The Council's consultation strategy encourages people to take part in discussions, debates and decision-making and improves our links with all sections of the community. In doing this, we are seeking to achieve greater participation in local democracy, especially for those who may previously have felt excluded. We want everyone who comes into contact with council services to feel involved and be able to influence policy and strategy.

The Council's consultation strategy sets out:

- Why we are consulting
- How we will consult
- Who we will consult

- When we will consult
- How consultation will be co-ordinated to make sure resources are used effectively
- How the outcomes will be reported

We believe the outcomes of improving the consultations we carry out will be:

- Improved understanding
- Improved relationships
- Improved quality of service delivery
- More responsive service delivery
- Priorities, policies and budgets based on people's needs and expectations

We use a wide variety of methods to consult and are committed to further exploring how we can increase participation in consultation exercises. We intend to publish the results of these.

Publishing consultation findings

Future, past and present consultation exercises are published on the Council's website when the Council's Consultation Register is updated. This is considered by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel and the Cabinet on an annual basis.

The results of individual consultation exercises are published in locations appropriate to each exercise. This includes in our housing service newsletter to Council tenants, the Council's Forester magazine, via leaflets in the Civic Offices and on the Council's website.

9. Information access

Access to information and services

Epping Forest District Council is committed to providing services to the community which reflect the needs and diversity of all its customers and service users. The Council will provide services to all of its diverse community in a way which is free from unlawful discrimination. We need to ensure that people know about the services we provide and that they do not face barriers when trying to use them. The process of assessing our services for their race equality impact is intended to uncover problems people may have accessing our services and we are committed to responding to these and planning to amend our services to overcome them.

We will learn from good practice elsewhere and seek to implement this in the services we provide. We will listen to our service users and work with them to develop a service they can access and fully benefit from.

Publication of assessment, consultation and monitoring outcomes

The Council will publish on its website:

- The results of any consultations about the RES
- An evaluation of progress against the RES after the first year of operation
- The results of any consultations on the race equality dimensions of new initiatives relevant to the Council's race equality duties

- Ethnic monitoring data on the Council's staff as part of an annual equal opportunities report

Public access to information

The public accesses the information that the Council publishes largely through the Council's website. We will make sure that the design of the website enables users to easily locate all information and publications.

An equal opportunities report will be published on the Council's website on an annual basis, where it can be accessed by the public. This will contain a review of progress over the year, including statutory information on equalities to comply with the employment duty, and also an annual review of progress against the Council's Corporate Equalities Action Plan.

10. Complaints by staff, service users and other organisations

Our approach to complaints

Epping Forest District Council has a general five-stage complaints procedure. The procedure is available on the Council's website and can also be obtained through any council information office, housing office or leisure centre. Members of the public should raise concerns about the Council's fulfilment of its commitment to equal opportunities through this complaints procedure.

When receiving complaints, whether from individuals, organisations or education providers, the Council follows published complaints procedures, which include the following principles:

- Complaints will be handled speedily and with rigorous standards for action and keeping people informed.
- The process will be consistent, treating people in similar circumstances in similar ways.
- Investigation of complaints will be thorough and objective.
- We will consider and respond to complaints in a fair and even-handed way.
- A full response will be provided which addresses all the issues raised.
- Clear information will be provided on what to do if people are unhappy with the response.
- Complaints will be regularly monitored.
- Action will be identified where necessary to secure improvements.

11. Action Planning for Race Equality

Our Race Equality Scheme must be underpinned by actions and commitments if it is to have meaning. The Performance Management Unit is responsible for co-ordinating and communicating corporate equalities actions, and the production and monitoring of our Corporate Equalities Action Plan (CEAP). This sets out the Council's intended actions to drive equalities forward in a co-ordinated way across all Directorates. It is attached at Appendix Five, and is based upon the framework provided by the Equality Standard For Local Government, using the following headings:

- Leadership and corporate commitment
- Consultation, community development and scrutiny
- Service delivery and customer care
- Employment and training

It has been reviewed in tandem with this review of our Race Equality Scheme, and progress is reported annually to the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel.

12. Review of this Race Equality Scheme

This scheme will be reviewed on a three-yearly basis. The next review is due in 2011. That said, if there is a requirement to review the Race Equality Scheme before this date for any reason, this will take place.