

Wigan Council Equality Scheme 2010-2013



Contents

Section 1: Introduction and background	p. 2
Section 2: What do we want to achieve through this Equality Scheme?	p. 5
Section 3: Making Wigan Borough fairer: tackling inequalities so that we deliver on our sustainable community strategy themes	p. 8
Section 4: Making sure we have the right internal processes in place	p. 16
Section 5: Implementation and monitoring	p. 21
Appendix 1: Action plan	
Appendix 2: Equality Policy Statement	

Section 1: Introduction and background

Fairness for all is at the heart of everything Wigan Council wants to achieve.

Equality is not a concept that applies only to minority groups in our borough – everyone is entitled to feel that they have been treated fairly and with respect. Wigan is changing and we need to make sure that everyone who lives or works here, or who is visiting our borough, is able to make a positive contribution to Wigan life.

All public organisations (for example, local councils, the health service and the police) have a legal duty to produce an Equality Scheme. We want to use this duty to help us make a real difference to people's lives. We have therefore made sure that our Equality Scheme is focussed on the important issues for people living in the Borough. To help us focus, we have combined all three of our strategic equality documents into this Equality Scheme – so this is our strategy, policy and action plan.

Two years ago, all the large agencies in the Borough looked at the important issues and recorded them in a document called the Community Strategy. All the large agencies are already doing work to address these issues. However, they know that some people are still not getting the same chances as everyone else.

A key issue highlighted in the Community Strategy is the impact that a person's socio-economic circumstances has on their life chances and experiences. In Wigan, the outcomes of those in our most deprived areas are significantly different to those in our most affluent areas. There are big differences in terms of average wage, life expectancy and qualification levels. However, when looking to tackle these circumstances and improve outcomes for the people of Wigan, a focus simply on employment, where they live or how much they earn isn't enough. There must also be a focus on *who* the people of Wigan are, and how this dimension affects their outcomes, in order to be able to effectively tackle the big issues that face the borough.

To develop this Scheme, we have therefore looked at information about how people might be being treated unfairly because of their age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, because they have a disability, as well as because of where they live. We have also looked at whether other circumstances might affect people's life chances – for example, being a lone parent, being an ex-offender, or being a child in Council care.

We have also talked to people who live in the Borough, people who work for the Council and elected councillors to find out what they think. For more information about the consultation we carried out, please see our website at www.wigan.gov.uk/equalitydiversity, or contact us at the details on page 19.

Using all of this information, we have looked at which groups of people need extra support to get fair life chances, or who may not always be treated fairly by the Council, the local community and local businesses.

The rest of this document sets out some context about how this Equality Scheme fits in with the other work that the Council and our partners are doing, and details what we are planning to do over the coming year to address the priority issues we have identified.

We are using our web pages to provide more information, and to help staff and communities use the Scheme. All of the information on our website can be made available in alternative formats by contacting us at the details on page 19.

We know that we have more work to do to collect information about the inequalities that people in Wigan experience. So, we have decided to keep this Equality Scheme constantly under review, and make adjustments to our action plan as we collect more information.

We can make this information available in other formats and languages on request - please contact us at the details on page 19 to request this.

How have we decided on the themes in our Equality Scheme?

The Sustainable Community Strategy and the Local Area Agreement

The Council and our public and voluntary sector partners have put together a Community Strategy, which identifies the areas that we need to work on together. Through this strategy, we are committed to tackling inequalities and making the Borough a place where everyone is treated fairly.

The Community Strategy has four principles:

- Ambitious Communities
- Living Healthier and Longer
- Realising aspirations
- Strong community

For each of these themes, the Council and our partners have agreed some performance indicators so that we can measure how well we are doing. These are detailed in our Local Area Agreement and are updated annually.

In order to achieve these ambitions, it is important through this Equality Scheme to understand which groups of people are currently not being treated fairly – who does not seem to be getting equal treatment from council services, local businesses and the community, and who does not seem to be getting the same life chances as others.

In this Equality Scheme, we set out our current understanding of these issues and our plans for taking actions to address them. The first part of the Scheme is therefore structured around the four themes in our Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Corporate Plan

The Council's Corporate Plan sets out what we need to do as an organisation in order to support the Community Strategy. It includes a commitment to delivery responsive, responsible, effective and efficient services. To achieve this, it is important that all of our services understand their customers and what their different needs are; and that they plan their services to meet these needs. The final section of the Scheme therefore sets out what we intend to do to support all our services to achieve this.

Equality legislation

There are currently numerous different laws relating to equality. This Scheme helps ensure the Council is meeting our obligations under these laws. In particular, as a public authority, we have a duty to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, particularly in respect of gender, ethnicity and disability. The new Equality Act extends this duty to cover religion, sexual orientation, people who are transgender and age. For more information about our legal obligations under equality law, see www.wigan.gov.uk/equalitydiversity .

Section 2: What do we want to achieve through this Equality Scheme?

What is Wigan Borough like now?

Wigan Borough is a friendly place where many people feel they belong. It has a strong sense of identity based on our proud traditions. People living here feel that there are strong support networks (especially family networks) and a strong community atmosphere. Many people living in the Borough have a strong sense of identity and belonging.

There are people from diverse backgrounds in the Borough, contributing to it being a great place to live and work. There are people of all ages - around 30% of Wigan's population is under 30, and around 25% is over retirement age. Just over 50% of the Borough's population is female. Different religions are represented – nearly 87% described themselves as Christian in the 2001 census; some people also recorded in the census that they are Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish. In schools, around 4% of young people (about 1700 young people) come from an ethnic background other than White, British. Nearly 12% of people in the Borough describe themselves as having a disability – with around 23% of people over 65 saying they have a disability. Based on national estimates, around 6% of the population (around 18,500 people) are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Across the North West of England, it is estimated that there are around 600-700 transgender people.

We also know that Wigan is comparatively deprived economically. It is the 67th most deprived local authority in England (out of 354), with many places in the Borough being in the top 10% most deprived nationally. The average income is around £22,438 per year compared to £25,121 nationally. Around 41% of people hold a 'blue collar' job, and around 43% of people a 'white collar' job. Around 6.7% of the working age population is unemployed.

At the moment, we know that some people do not feel they are being treated fairly. We also know that many residents feel that racism, homophobia and 'disablism' are common.

What do we want Wigan Borough to be like?

Through the Community Strategy, we have agreed with our partners that we want the Borough to be 'a place where people matter and you can afford to live the life you want'.

Through this Equality Scheme, we want to make sure that everyone feels that this vision is real for them. Above all, we want people living in the Borough to feel that life here is fair.

This is not something that can be achieved over-night. So, this Equality Scheme sets out how, over the next year, we will continue our journey towards removing the inequalities in the Borough.

How have we decided on our priorities to make sure we achieve our ambition?

It is clearly not possible to do everything at once. We have therefore thought carefully about how to prioritise the actions we need to take over the next three years. We have looked at:

- Information about our population – how big is it? What different ethnic backgrounds are there? How many people of each age and gender are there? Which religions are represented? How many people with disabilities? How many people who are lesbian,

gay and bisexual? How many who are transgender? How many people who live in deprived wards?

- Information about who in the population is not getting the results and life chances they deserve – for example, who is not getting good GCSE results? Who is dying earlier than average?
- National and regional research about inequalities and how they might apply to Wigan Borough.
- Information from our local population, both people who are interested as individuals and people who are interested as a member of a voluntary group. We held face-to-face focus groups before we started drafting the Equality Scheme and we then did a formal consultation on an early draft of the Scheme to gain people's views on which of our long list of issues we should prioritise for immediate action. For more information about this consultation, please see our website at www.wigan.gov.uk/equalitydiversity or contact us at the details on page 19.
- Information from officers and managers in the Council about the issues for people living in Wigan Borough and the actions that might help address them.

Using all of this information gave us a long list of issues. However, we want to focus on just a few key areas, so that we can make sure we make a real difference. We have therefore used the information from the data we gathered and consultation with local residents to identify our top priorities – two for each of the four Sustainable Community Strategy themes, and five internal priorities. For more information about why we have chosen these priorities, see www.wigan.gov.uk/equalitydiversity or contact us at the details on page 19.

The priority issues that we will be working on over the coming year are:

- Improve vulnerable people's access to safe and reliable transport options that enable them to maintain their independence and access employment and leisure opportunities.
- Reduce the impact that a person's background and social identity has on their ability to gain and retain employment, especially in a time of recession.
- Reduce the impact that a person's background and social identity has on their health and life expectancy.
- Reduce the impact that the background and social identity of vulnerable people has on their level of independence and dignity
- Reduce the impact that a young person's background and social identity has on their educational attainment.
- Reduce the impact that a person's background and social identity has on the likelihood that they will experience bullying.
- Reduce the crime and fear of crime experienced by vulnerable people in Wigan Borough.
- Improve the Council's support for voluntary and community sector groups that work with people who experience inequalities in Wigan Borough

In relation to our internal processes, we are also going to prioritise the following:

- Create a positive and inclusive environment for staff to work in, and ensure staff are confident in working with people from different backgrounds to themselves
- Improve our understanding of our residents' different needs and how well these are being met
- Develop ways to engage effectively with people taking account of their social characteristics

- Ensure that we are clear about how our services and policies will affect different customers
- Ensure our communications are accessible to all.

Although we have used a broad range of information to set these priorities, there are still some important gaps in our knowledge about the people who use our service, and who is not getting the results and life chances they need. For example, in a lot of cases, we only know some basic things like age, gender and postcode about our service users. We often don't know things like their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or whether they have a disability. There are times when this could significantly affect the types of services that people might need from us. So, we want to know more about who uses our services, and about those who don't, so that we can make sure they meet people's individual needs. Similarly, we need to know which groups in our community are not getting fair life chances, so that we can work more closely with them to tackle the problems they face.

The remainder of this document sets out in more detail why we have chosen the priorities we have, and what we are going to do to address them.

Appendix 1 sets out our action plan to address the issues we identify in this document.

Appendix 2 sets out a statement of our commitments and policy relating to equality issues.

Section 3: Making Wigan Borough Fairer: Tackling inequalities so that we deliver on our Sustainable Community Strategy themes

Ambitious Communities

The Sustainable Community Strategy says that we want opportunities to exist that:

- Allow people to fulfil their ambitions within a local and regional economy that provides ease of access to jobs and services.
- Provide people with increased income levels and able to access better quality, affordable homes in safe neighbourhoods.
- Help our communities to look to the future and protect our environment for future generations.

We have identified the following as our priorities for addressing inequalities, so that everyone can have fair and equal access to these opportunities within the Borough:

- Improve vulnerable people's access to safe and reliable transport options that enable them to maintain their independence and access employment and leisure opportunities.
- Reduce the impact that a person's background and social identity has on their ability to gain and retain employment, especially in a time of recession.

Why have we picked these priorities?

Transport

Locally, our information tells us that people in some of our more deprived areas really struggle to access public services and schools by public transport. This is shown in our data, and was also reported strongly in both the focus groups and formal consultation with residents – 63% of people identified it as a very important issue to address. It was also clear through our consultation that it is often difficult for people with disabilities to use transport – the buses are not always suitable for wheelchairs, for example. There was a perception of crime on the buses, which was putting some people off travelling. It was suggested that these issues might all be particularly pertinent for older people, reducing their confidence in travelling around the Borough and therefore making them more isolated.

This local anecdotal evidence is supported by national research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which suggests that the people most affected by lack of access to safe and reliable transport are older people, young people and people with disabilities.

Economy

Locally, our information tells us that young people and those already in low paid jobs have been the worst hit by the recession. Clearly, this has the potential to increase the difference between the deprived areas in Wigan and the more affluent areas, as well as making it ever more difficult for young people to gain their first full-time employment. However, a strong message from the consultation is that there are a lot of other groups of people who also need support. For example, single parents find it particularly hard to pay child care costs, simply because they only have one income; ex-offenders find that they are often discriminated against in job interviews; older people may not show up in statistics as being hard hit by the recession because they are likely to also be claiming benefits but,

anecdotally, we know that this has been an issue; employment is also consistently reported as an issue by people with disabilities – issues are partly around gaining employment and employers' attitudes and willingness/ability to make reasonable adjustments, but also around bullying in the workplace and physically accessing employment – which partly links in to the transport point above, but also practical barriers such as dropped curbs and obstructions on pavements.

Nationally, we also know that in some areas of employment women are paid less than men for similar work, and that there are still barriers for some women in moving into more senior positions. We also know that people with disabilities, people from BME backgrounds, people who are lesbian, gay and bisexual and people who are transgender report being discriminated against, both in terms of accessing jobs but also in terms of the workplace environment and therefore their ability to retain jobs or be happy in them. For example, those with a work-limiting condition who are also classified as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) are much less likely to be full time employed than those without a disability, and are also much more likely to have no qualifications; amongst Transgender communities, despite high levels of higher qualifications, there are lower than expected average incomes and particularly high rates of unemployment, with the Manchester Equality Review finding that 75% of the Transgender community had not made the transition to their preferred gender role because of their job or workplace.

However, we don't have a clear picture of the main inequalities in Wigan Borough, and we need to test out the information we have that is anecdotal before we can decide on an appropriate response. If it is an issue for only a few people, we might do something quite different compared to if it's an issue for a lot of people.

What are we going to do to address these priorities?

What we need to do is to develop, locally, a clearer understanding of which groups of people in Wigan Borough need additional support in accessing safe and reliable transport options, and gaining and retaining employment. This will include collecting more data, but it will also involve doing more in-depth consultation with local people about the issues they experience around transport and the economy, and what changes would make things easier for them. We can then take actions to:

- Increase these groups' ability to access employment and leisure opportunities to improve their quality of life; enable them to contribute to the economy; and enable them to remain independent for as long as possible;
- Increase these groups' aspirations and employability – including support to develop skills, to know what opportunities are out there and some really practical skills like how to apply for jobs and how to do well in interviews;
- Remove barriers to employment e.g. combat misconceptions employers have around these groups; encourage local businesses to ensure their workplace culture is open and welcoming to people from different social backgrounds.

We will be making a start on this work over the next year, whilst we further develop our understanding. For more information about the actions we'll be taking and the targets we've set ourselves, see the action plan at Appendix 1.

Living Healthier and Longer

The Sustainable Community Strategy says that we want to provide opportunities that help support people to make choices that improve quality of life and enable people to live longer particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We have identified the following as our priorities for addressing inequalities, so that everyone can have fair and equal access to opportunities within the Borough:

- Reduce the impact that a person's background and social identity has on their health and life expectancy.
- Reduce the impact that the background and social identity of vulnerable people has on their level of independence and dignity

Why have we picked these priorities?

Health and life expectancy

We know that health issues and life expectancy are significant issues in Wigan. On average, people in Wigan are dying younger than they are nationally – the average life expectancy for women is 79.78 and for men is 75.59 years; compared to 82.02 and 77.93 nationally. Only 20.69% of adults actively participate in sport; 15 out of 25 wards in the 2006 Lifestyle Survey recorded smoking prevalence of more than 25%; and there are high levels of obesity (18.03% of children in year 6; 13 out of 25 wards with obesity rates above 20%).

We also know that these issues are significantly worse for people who live in deprived areas than people who live in more affluent areas – for example, 33% of routine manual workers smoke, compared to 16% of managerial-professional workers; and we know that men are more likely to die younger than women.

However, we don't know much about whether a person's ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disability also has an impact. From our consultation, we have anecdotal information that some people have particular difficulty in accessing information about living healthier lives – for example, people with sight impairments or reading difficulties; and people with disabilities may have problems accessing health services. Nationally, we know that people who are transgender and who are lesbian, gay or bisexual report that they do not feel confident accessing health services, and gypsies and travellers are more likely to die early, especially child death; and poor health of some BME groups is reported. These provide some pointers to understanding which groups may have a particular issue with living longer and healthier lives, but we need to do more to really understand this.

Independence and dignity

A very strong theme in the responses to our consultation was that people feel there are currently a lot of barriers to them being able to be independent. Social care services provide a lot of support, which is often very personalised (especially through things like Direct Payments). However, there are some very practical barriers remaining – things like access to buildings, both Council and those of private businesses and shops; blockages on pavements making it difficult for people who use wheelchairs to navigate them; vulnerable people (particularly older people) being particularly negatively impacted by rogue traders and cold calling; or people feeling isolated socially because they are not confident travelling, or don't feel they have anywhere to go. From the Place Survey (a big survey of more than 1500

local people), we know that only around 31% of older people feel they receive the support they need to live independently.

It is clear that we need to do more work to understand whether some groups of people are more affected by these issues than others. We know that older people and people with disabilities are particularly affected, but we don't know much about whether a person's ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or gender also has an impact. Nationally, we know that people who tend to need more support to live independent lives are people with a learning/physical/sensory disability, mental ill health or dementia, frailty due to age, an acquired brain injury, a drug/alcohol problem, some physical illnesses and homeless people. However, we need to do more work to understand the particular local issues.

The consultation also highlighted that we need to understand more about the needs of carers (both formal and informal), and the inequalities they experience.

What are we going to do to address these priorities?

What we need to do is to develop, locally, a clearer understanding of which groups of people in Wigan Borough need additional support in living healthier lives and maintaining independence and dignity. This will include collecting more data, but it will also involve doing more in-depth consultation with local people about the issues they experience around these issues, and what changes would make things easier for them. We can then take actions to:

- Develop a clear understanding of which groups of people are currently struggling to access the support they need to live healthy lives and maintain their independence and dignity - and why
- Remove the barriers to these groups accessing the information and services they need
- Ensure mechanisms are in place to support these groups into the future - including in response to uncontrollable changes such as climate change

We will be making a start on this work over the next year, whilst we further develop our understanding. For more information about the actions we'll be taking and the targets we've set ourselves, see the action plan at Appendix 1.

Realising Aspirations

The Sustainable Community Strategy says that we want the people of the borough to:

- Have raised aspirations for what they as individuals can achieve, particularly young people and people from disadvantaged communities.
- Be equipped with the right life skills and the qualifications employers need to achieve their ambitions and which enable them to participate.

We have identified the following as our priorities for addressing inequalities, so that everyone can have fair and equal access to opportunities within the Borough:

- Reduce the impact that a young person's background and social identity has on their educational attainment.
- Reduce the impact that a person's background and social identity has on the likelihood that they will experience bullying.

Why have we picked these priorities?

Educational attainment

Young people's educational attainment is a key area to get right, in terms of supporting people to get a good start in life. However, in Wigan, young people's attainment is below national average - 45.8% 5 A*-C GCSEs (including English and Maths), compared to 48.1% nationally, and we know that GCSE attainment and entry to higher education is considerably lower in our deprived areas. However, some young people in deprived areas do overcome this disadvantage – for example, Worsley Mesnes is the 9th most deprived of Wigan's 25 wards, but the 4th highest achieving (with an average of 62% A*-C GCSEs). It is clear that deprivation is not the only thing that affects educational attainment. There is a much more complicated picture – we know that a person's gender and ethnicity seem to have an impact on their attainment.

We need to understand more about the impact of other factors on attainment such as disability, religion and (where possible, i.e. for older children), sexual orientation as well. Nationally, we know that boys, especially Black African, Black Caribbean, and Pakistani boys; children of both sexes from the Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma communities; children in care; children who speak English as a second language; and young people with behavioural difficulties tend to under-achieve. We also know that attainment is affected by social factors like (i) parental expectations and involvement in their child's education; (ii) access to facilities and support outside of school; (iii) lack of understanding of what the opportunities are. We need to do more to understand these differences in Wigan. This will mean we can target support more effectively to those who really need it.

Experience of bullying

It was clear from the consultation we carried out that bullying in schools is an issue that local people feel strongly about – it was seen as having a real impact on self-confidence and enjoyment of life. 71% of respondents highlighted this as a very important issue to address.

We know that bullying is a real issue - it can make pupils' lives unhappy, can hinder their academic progress, and can sometimes push children into truancy. In extreme cases it can lead to pupils taking their own lives. National research tells us that the children most likely to be bullied are those who are different in appearance, speech or background from other

pupils. For example, research carried out by Stonewall suggests that 2 in 5 primary school teachers have witnessed children being subjected to homophobic bullying in their schools, and that it is the second most common cause of bullying in secondary schools (after bullying due to weight/height). And a recent survey suggested that more than half of teachers report racist bullying in schools. Children in Council care also report being concerned that they will be targeted for bullying.

Locally, a survey of year 5 – year 11 Wigan pupils conducted within November 2009 found no significant differences between genders in frequency of bullying. Sexual orientation was the most frequently cited reason for bullying from the 7 social identities with 5% of all respondents claiming to have experienced homophobic bullying at least once in the last 12 months. The survey also found a high level of homophobic language being used within both primary and secondary schools and confusion over the acceptability of such language and homophobic bullying. In response to this finding a training event was held for both primary and secondary staff looking at how to challenge homophobic language. Its aim was to improve consistency and confidence in dealing with this issue and lead to a reduction in homophobic language and bullying. Wigan Council will also be continuing it's involvement within the Stonewall Education Champions programme to further reduce bullying due to sexual orientation.

Although young carers and children in Council care were found nationally to be more vulnerable to bullying this was not found to be a common reason given for bullying within the Wigan survey. It is possible however that they were at increased likelihood of other forms of bullying but this information was not captured within the 2009 survey. The survey will therefore be adapted for future years to collect information on all of the 7 social identities and this will be used to tailor future provision to address any identified inequalities.

What are we going to do to address these priorities?

What we need to do is to continue to develop, locally, a clearer understanding of which groups of people in Wigan Borough need additional support in achieving good results in education and reducing their vulnerability to bullying. This will include collecting more data, but it will also involve doing more in-depth consultation with local people about the issues they experience around these themes. We can then take actions to:

- Develop a clear understanding of which groups are underachieving in Wigan, and which groups are experiencing bullying - and why;
- Increase these groups' aspirations and reduce their vulnerability to bullying;
- Increase these groups' attainment and ability to deal with any bullying they experience.

We will be continue this work over the next year, and further develop our understanding. For more information about the actions we'll be taking and the targets we've set ourselves, see the action plan at Appendix 1.

Stronger communities

The Sustainable Community Strategy says that we want:

- To support and care for the well-being of others and the future.
- A community with a strong sense of what it is capable of achieving and where there are opportunities to get involved, particularly for young people, in shaping the future.

We have identified the following as our priorities for addressing inequalities, so that everyone can have fair and equal access to opportunities within the Borough:

- Reduce the crime and fear of crime experienced by vulnerable people in Wigan Borough.
- Improve the Council's support for voluntary and community sector groups that work with people who experience inequalities in Wigan Borough

Why have we picked these priorities?

Reducing crime and fear of crime

Crime and fear of crime were major issues raised in the focus groups we carried out to inform this Equality Scheme, with people suggesting that it had a significant impact on how people feel about themselves and the area, and of which many had had personal negative experiences. 79% of people responding to our consultation felt that this was a very important issue to address.

We know that we perform in the bottom 25% nationally in terms of residents' perceptions of crime. In our focus groups, there was a general agreement that racist, homophobic and 'disablist' hate crime are significant– and this is supported by statistics, which show that, nationally, people with a disability are four times more likely to be victims of crime; people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and people from some ethnic minorities report high levels of fear of crime; and women report feeling less safe than men. There was also a perception amongst our consultees that older people are more vulnerable to crime and anti-social behaviour. However, there is no clear evidence to support this. We also know that domestic abuse is a particular problem in Wigan.

We also want to do more to understand whether any other groups of people are particularly vulnerable to crime.

Support for voluntary and community sector groups

In response to consultation, both the formal consultation and the focus groups, people highlighted a need to support voluntary and community groups who are providing an essential service to vulnerable groups within our community. We know that voluntary groups are often able to understand more about the very local needs of local communities and to work more closely with individuals than is possible for a large organisation like the Council. It is also clear that many local people have a strong sense of trust in their local voluntary groups. We therefore want to support the voluntary sector in fulfilling this important role, and helping reduce some of the inequalities identified throughout this document. We also hope to work with voluntary groups to help improve our understanding of the different needs of our local communities.

What are we going to do to address these priorities?

What we need to do is to develop, locally, a clearer understanding of which groups of people in Wigan Borough need additional support in reducing their vulnerability to crime, and which groups would benefit from additional support from the voluntary and community sector. This will include collecting more data, but it will also involve doing more in-depth consultation with local people about the issues they experience around these themes, and what changes would make things easier for them. We can then take actions to:

- Develop a clear understanding of which groups are more vulnerable to crime - and why
- Reduce these groups' vulnerability to and fear of crime and increase these groups' ability to deal with crime they experience
- Develop a clear understanding of the voluntary and community sector groups currently providing support to people who experience inequalities, how they should be supported and what public services should learn from them

We will be making a start on this work over the next year, whilst we further develop our understanding. For more information about the actions we'll be taking and the targets we've set ourselves, see the action plan at Appendix 1.

Section 4: Making sure we have the right internal processes in place

Our Corporate Plan sets out that the Council will always strive to have responsive, responsible, effective and efficient services. In order to achieve this, it is vital that we really understand our customers and what their different needs are, and design our services accordingly. This will let us deliver services promptly and efficiently that are really targeted at people's needs, cutting out duplication and waste.

In order to do this effectively across an organisation the size of the Council, we need to put in place guidance and processes to support all of our services. Having talked to people who use the existing systems across the Council; looked at national best practice; and looked at the views the people have expressed in our consultation, we have identified the following as the priority areas we need to focus on in the next year:

- Create a positive and inclusive environment for staff to work in, and ensure staff are confident in working with people from different backgrounds to themselves
- Improve our understanding of our residents' different needs and how well these are being met
- Develop ways to engage effectively with people taking account of their social characteristics
- Ensure that we are clear about how our services and policies will affect different customers
- Ensure our communications are accessible to all.

Why have we picked these priorities?

Create a positive and inclusive environment for staff to work in, and ensure staff are confident in working with people from different backgrounds to themselves

There are three major areas that we want to focus on to help address this priority:

- The culture of the organisation;
- The opportunities for recruitment, retention, development and progression;
- The training available to staff to help them feel confident working with people from diverse backgrounds.

The culture of the organisation

There is a huge body of research to suggest that a happy and confident workforce, where people feel they can be themselves and also feel comfortable working with a variety of different people, is vital both to employees' mental health and well-being, and also to the productivity and quality of service provided by the organisation. Improving the workplace culture at the Council, to make sure that it is inclusive and welcoming, was a clear priority for employees, both in a focus group, and also in consultation responses.

Particular issues relating to equality that were highlighted were:

- Managers need to treat employees as individuals, with their individual needs being met, rather than focusing on processes;

- Managers also need to make sure that all employees feel they have fair and equal access to training and development, and opportunities for career progression.
- We need to continue to improve two-way communication within the Council so that employees understand what is being done, why and how it will affect them as individuals, so that employees have the opportunity to raise issues and know that they will be responded to appropriately and that they have an opportunity to contribute to decisions made about them

The opportunities for recruitment, retention, development and progression

It is also important that all people, whatever social group they belong to, feel they have opportunities to work for the Council; and that all employees feel they have development opportunities and opportunities to progress within the organisation.

At present, we know that:

- Around 70% of our workforce is female;
- Around 48% of our workforce is part time, with around 87% of our part-time workers being female;
- 21% of our workforce are 35 or under, and 21% are 55 or over;
- 64% of our staff have informed us they are Christian; nearly 12% say they have no religion or belief; around 2.5% say they have a belief other than Christian; and around 22% haven't informed us of their religion or belief;
- 1.4% of our staff have declared a disability, compared to 4.8% of the Borough's population who are estimated to have a disability and be able to work;
- 2.3% of our staff are from a minority ethnic background. This is similar to the figure of 2.1% people in Wigan from an ethnic minority background recorded in the 2001 census;
- Management grades make up 7% of our workforce; of this 7%, 51% are women, and 5.1% come from a minority ethnic background.

We know that we have further work to do to fully understand trends, regarding how fairly staff are treated and whether all have access to development opportunities. Over the coming year, we have plans (detailed in our action plan) to begin addressing this by collecting and analysing more comprehensive information about our workforce, considering particularly:

- Numbers of staff of each social identity in post and the part-time, full-time breakdown;
- Breakdown of staff on higher pay bands, based on their social identity;
- Breakdown of people taking part in the recruitment process, based on their social identity;
- People involved in grievance procedures, based on their social identity;
- People involved in disciplinary procedures, based on their social identity;
- Reasons for leaving, based on their social identity;
- Staff who access training, based on their social identity.

More detailed information on the data we currently hold on each of these areas will be available on our website from July 2010.

The training available to staff to help them feel confident working with people from diverse backgrounds

It is vital that our staff feel confident in working with both employees and customers from a range of different backgrounds. Both our employee focus groups and our consultation with residents suggests that employees may not always have the cultural experience to always

respond appropriately to people. Residents particularly highlighted that training to enable staff to be more confident working with people from different backgrounds to themselves would improve the quality of the service they received. We need to look at how we review employees personal development as well as the training we offer.

Improve our understanding of our residents' different needs and how well these are being met

In order to deliver the best possible services to our customers, we have to understand who they are and what their needs are. Many services have begun incorporating these principles into their service planning and policy/strategy development through needs analysis. However, at the moment, we often lack the data to do this comprehensively. We have excellent data sets based on geographic location and level of deprivation. However, we have more limited information around a person's other social characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and disability. To effectively meet all our customers' needs, we have to understand the differences in these groups' needs and plan for them in the design of our services.

At a time when budgets are increasingly tight, being able to target services as effectively as possible to meet need and be 'right first time' is vital. The only way to do this effectively is to fully understand our customer base and its needs – and this can only be done (by 'segmenting' the customer base to identify the whole range of needs that have to be met.

We will therefore be doing a lot of work over the coming year to understand more about our customers' different needs, and the impact this should have on the design of our services.

Develop ways to engage effectively with people taking account of their social characteristics

An important part of improving our understanding of our customers' needs is improving the way we engage with residents. Partly, this is about consulting effectively. However, it is also about providing more opportunities for people to be involved in planning services, or even direct involvement in designing and delivering them.

At present, most of our engagement mechanisms are based around where someone lives – the Township Forums and Partners and Communities Together (PACT) are examples of this. We need to do more to make sure we are engaging effectively with people based on their identity and interests, as well as where they live.

Ensure that we are clear about how our services and policies will affect different customers

Designing our services to make sure they meet our customers' different needs is vital. This is the reason for collecting the information detailed above. It is the way that we will make sure that equality considerations are taken account of in everything we do – from whether the local library has suitable access for people who use wheelchairs, to thinking about the impact that plans for new developments and streetlighting might have on people who are vulnerable to crime.

Our 'customer impact assessment' (CIA) process (known as Equality Impact Assessment in other organisations) will encourage all our services to think about the following six key questions in all their work:

- Who is your service for? Think about what makes your customers different from each other.
- Who is using your service and who is not? What stops people using your service?
- Who is least likely to be happy with the service they get from you? What reasons do they have?
- Who is not getting the outcome they need from your service? Why is this?
- What changes could you make to the service so that more people are able to use it, be happy with it and get the outcomes they need from it?
- In what ways could making these changes have a negative effect on other customers? What can you do about this?

Wherever possible, we aim to embed these six questions into existing internal Council processes – so that people consider them as a matter of course. The processes we have identified to embed the questions into are:

- Corporate planning (including budget setting);
- Service planning;
- Procurement and commissioning;
- Project and programme management;
- Decision-making (especially reports to senior managers and committees);
- New policy and strategy development.

We also intend to develop a very short and simple format for publishing CIAs, so that the focus remains on the process of considering the six core questions, rather than completing the template.

This will mean that all of our work – whether it's a policy, a strategy, a tender specification or plans for changing how our services are delivered – will automatically consider equality implications. However, at present, we recognise that this approach is not embedded. We have therefore, in the interim, identified some key policies and strategies that require impact assessments to be carried out. These are detailed in the action plan at Appendix 1. We also understand that an important part of ensuring our services meet our customers' needs is looking at who are services are delivered by, and how they are delivered. We therefore commit to developing our consideration of this through our commissioning and procurement processes.

Ensure our communications are accessible to all

Improving the accessibility of our communications was one of the biggest issues arising from the residents' focus groups – there was a strong feeling that we need to continue to make improve our communication methods are suitable for everyone. For example, particular issues were raised around people who cannot use the internet, cannot read very well or who find it difficult or uncomfortable to use the telephone. In the formal consultation, 69% of people said that this was a very important issue to address.

We know that we need to do more to understand the needs of the people we are trying to communicate with, and to target information in a way that best suits those needs. Our action plan at appendix one details some of the actions we will be taking to address this.

What are we going to do to address these priorities?

We will be making a start on this work over the next year. For more information about the actions we'll be taking and the targets we've set ourselves, see the action plan at Appendix 1.

Section 5: Implementation and monitoring

Having developed this Equality Scheme, it is clearly important that we act on the issues identified.

All of the Council's services have taken part in planning actions to address the priorities we have identified in this Equality Scheme. The actions they are going to take are recorded in the action plan at Appendix 1. The Council's services have also all included the actions that are relevant to them in their service plans, to make sure that they are delivered as part of their day-to-day business.

We will make sure that the actions we have committed to are delivered by:

- Regular monitoring by a group of performance officers and heads of service who will also act as a sounding board for developing approaches for embedding equality work
- Reporting any areas that are not on track to senior officers with a particular responsibility for equality – our Diversity Champions
- Reporting any issues Diversity Champions are not able to resolve to the Senior Management Team so they can make a decision on the way forward and advise Cabinet on strategic issues such as the commitment of resources to tackling equality issues
- Reporting performance against the action plan to the Building Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee

We know that we have more work to do to collect information about the inequalities that people in Wigan experience. So, we have decided to keep this Equality Scheme constantly under review, and make adjustments to our action plan as we collect more information. We will carry out a full review of the Equality Scheme in spring 2011, based on the progress we have made to date on our actions, and any additional information that we have gathered.

This Scheme will be published on our website at www.wigan.gov.uk/equalitydiversity. We are also using our web pages to provide more information, and to help staff and communities use the Scheme. All of the information on our website can be made available in alternative formats by contacting us at the details below.

Contacting us

If you want any further information about this Equality Scheme, please contact the Equality and Cohesion Team at the details below:

By 'phone on 01942 487363

By e-mail at Equality&CohesionTeam@wigan.gov.uk

By post at:

Equality and Cohesion Team
Wigan Town Hall
Library Street
Wigan
WN1 1YN

We can make this information available in other formats and languages on request - please contact us at the details above to request this.

Appendix 1: Action Plan – see separate attachments

Appendix 2: Equality Policy Statement

Through the Sustainable Community Strategy, we have agreed with our partners that, in 2026, we want the Borough to be *A place where people matter and you can afford to live the life you want*. Through our equality commitments, we want to make sure that everyone feels that this vision is real for them. Above all, we want people living in the Borough to feel that life here is fair.

We know that, in many aspects of society, people may experience discrimination and prejudice that can lead to the creation of barriers that limit people's chances and, therefore, their quality of life. The Council is committed to addressing these issues in our role as an employer, as a community leader, as a procurer of services and in our service delivery. Throughout all of these functions, we will aim to tackle persistent inequalities, including those arising based on:

- social class
- gender identity
- age
- race (including colour, nationality, national or ethnic origin)
- religious belief
- disability
- sexual orientation
- or on any other factor relating to an individual's social identity.

Commitment to our citizens

Our aim is to provide services which are appropriate to everyone and accessible to all people of the borough. We also seek to use our role as a community leader and procurer of services to influence others to create a fairer and more equal society.

The Council will:

- Promote respectful relations between people in our communities
- Promote policies and actions which acknowledge and respond to the needs of specific social groups when considering the design, practicality and delivery of all service provision.
- Work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination and reducing inequalities in all areas of life in the Borough.
- Work with partner organisations to combine our efforts in tackling inequalities, reducing duplication and learning from each other.

Commitment to our employees

As an employer, the Council is committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all its existing and potential employees.

The Council:

- Expects all employees to behave with respect towards all their colleagues and customers;
- Respects cultural difference and promotes an environment of cultural awareness;
- Will ensure all people have equal chances of recruitment, retention, development and promotion, including areas of underrepresentation in the workforce;
- Will ensure employees are able to express their concerns if they do not feel these commitments are being kept.