

Committee: Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Organisations

Date: 22 July 2009

Agenda item: 7

Wards: All

Subject: Draft Corporate Equality Scheme

Lead officer: Kate Martyn, Head of Stronger Communities

Lead member: Councillor Henry Nelles, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement

Forward Plan reference number: 788

Contact officer: Maureen Branch-Davis (maureen.branch-davis@merton.gov.uk)

Recommendations:

That the Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Organisations:

- A. Considers and comments on the draft Corporate Equality Scheme.
 - B. Encourages Ethnic Minority organisations to give their views on the draft document and the priorities set out in the Scheme.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. To give the Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority organisations an opportunity to consider and comment on the draft Corporate Equality Scheme, as part of the public consultation exercise.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Merton's draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2010-2013, is a three-year strategy that sets out what Merton will do to tackle discrimination and inequality and promote equal opportunities in Merton.
- 2.2. The draft Scheme sets out Merton's vision, aspirations and commitment to promoting equality, and lists key priorities against each of the six equality strands as drivers for improvement
- 2.3. Merton's current Corporate Equality Scheme will expire at the end of 2009. Under existing equalities legislation, the Council is bound by a 'general and specific duty' to have statutory schemes in place for race, disability and gender. With the publication of the Equality Bill that was introduced to parliament on 27 April 2009, it is proposed that this 'duty' is extended to the three other areas covered by equalities legislation to include; age, religion and belief and sexual orientation. A new duty called Socio-economic Duty will also seek to address inequalities based on a person's social class and background.
- 2.4. The draft new Scheme incorporates a generic statutory approach across the various equality strands that reflects existing and emerging legislation. It makes links to key priorities and objectives as set out in Merton's

Community Plan, Business Plan and the Local Area Agreement and takes account of the five performance areas as set out in the new Equality Framework for Local Government.

- 2.5. We have also identified a number of crosscutting priorities such as promoting community cohesion; access to information and services; community safety and educational attainment. This reflects an inclusive approach to promoting equalities on multiple levels across all equality strands.
- 2.6. The next stage of the process will be to develop the Corporate Equality Scheme Action Plan that will set out the actions we will take to meet our equality priorities both corporately and departmentally. This work will take place during the public consultation period and will form part of the final document that goes to full Council on 25 November 2009. The JCC will have an opportunity to review the Action Plan at its meeting in October.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. Under current race, disability and gender anti-discrimination legislation public authorities have a legal 'general duty' to set out how they intend to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination
 - Promote equality of opportunity; and
 - Promote good relations between people of different backgrounds.

Failure to produce and publish an Equality Scheme and Action Plan would mean the Council is not fulfilling its legal obligations and could be subject to legal action.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. In developing the Scheme we have involved and consulted with a number of community and faith groups and equality groups.

External consultation already taken place with:

Ethnic Minority Centre

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community Forum

Interfaith Forum

JCC with Ethnic Minority Organisations

Your Shout (Children and Young People with disabilities group)

Disabled Go Forum

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Forum

Internal consultations planned with:

Staff groups

Unions

5 **TIMETABLE**

Public consultation period	6 July 2009 - 11 September 2009
Overview and Scrutiny Commission – pre decision scrutiny	11 October 2009
Standards Committee	21 October 2009
JCC with Ethnic Minority Organisations	21 October 2009
Cabinet	10 November 2009
Council – for adoption	25 November 2009
Published on Council’s website	December 2009

6 **FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. Failure to implement equality legislation could result in the cost of discrimination claims being incurred.

7 **LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1. As a public authority the Council has a duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people of different backgrounds. The publication of a new Corporate Equality Scheme fulfils the Council’s legal obligations relating to equalities legislation.

8 **HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1. By developing and producing a new Corporate Equality Scheme, the Council is re-affirming its commitment to human rights, equality and community cohesion. Merton’s approach to equality and diversity is driven by its overall vision of Merton – a great place to live, work, learn and visit. A revision of the scheme will encourage a wider public debate about equalities in Merton and the actions needed to address inequality.

9 **CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1. There is a risk of increased hate crime activity directed towards certain groups if there is no commitment to eliminate discrimination and harassment.

10 **RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1. There is a risk to the Council’s reputation if it fails to produce and implement its statutory schemes for race, disability and gender. Additionally there is a risk of claims of discrimination based on race, disability, gender, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

11 **APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

- Draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2010-2013

12 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 12.1. Merton’s Corporate Equality Scheme 2006-2009

<http://www.merton.gov.uk/equality-sch-eme.htm>

13 CONTACTS

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London Borough of Merton
**Merton's Corporate Equality
Scheme 2010-2013**
Consultation: July-September 2009

1. About this consultation

This consultation is part of Merton's legal duty and commitment to promoting equality of opportunity towards all individuals, groups, communities, and different equality groups living and working in the borough.

2. What does this consultation cover?

This consultation sets out what the Council plans to do over the next three years (2010 –2013) to eliminate discrimination and harassment, promote good relations between people of different backgrounds and promote equality of opportunity for the following groups of people:

- Children and young people;
- Older people;
- Disabled people;
- People from different ethnic minority backgrounds and Gypsies and Travellers;
- People who practise a religion or belief, and those of no faith;
- Women, men and trans people; and
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

3. How you can get involved

We are interested in getting your views on the following aspects of this draft Corporate Equality Scheme:

- The priorities we have identified;
- What Merton can do as an employer to promote equality of opportunity in the workplace; and
- Your general views on the content of the scheme

4. Timescales

In line with good practice, this consultation will run for 10 weeks, from Monday 6 July 2009 – Friday 11 September 2009

Request for document translation

Merton's draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2010-2013

If you need any part of this document explained in your language, please tick box and contact us either by writing or by phone using our details below.

- Albanian** Nëse ju nevojitet ndonjë pjesë e këtij dokumenti e shpjeguar në gjuhën amtare ju lutemi shënojeni kutinë dhe na kontaktoni duke na shkruar ose telefononi duke përdorur detajet e mëposhtme.
- Bengali** এই ডকুমেন্ট কোনসে অংশ আপনার নিজ ভাষায় বুঝতে চাইলে, দয়া করে সংশ্লিষ্ট (করে) টিক চিহ্ন দিন এবং চিঠি দিবে বা ফোন করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন। নিচে যোগাযোগের বিবরণ দেওয়া হয়েছে।
- French** Si vous avez besoin que l'on vous explique une partie de ce document dans votre langue, cochez la case et contactez-nous par courrier ou par téléphone à nos coordonnées figurant ci-dessous.
- Korean** 만일 본 서류의 어떤 부분이라도 귀하의 모국어로 설명된 것이 필요하다면, 상자속에 표시를 하고 우리에게 전화나 서신으로 연락하십시오.
- Polish** Aby otrzymać część tego dokumentu w polskiej wersji językowej proszę zaznaczyć kwadrat i skontaktować się z nami drogą piśmenną lub telefoniczną pod poniżej podanym adresem lub numerem telefonu.
- Portuguese** Caso você necessite qualquer parte deste documento explicada em seu idioma, favor assinalar a quadrícula respectiva e contatar-nos por escrito ou por telefone usando as informações para contato aqui fornecidas.
- Somali** Haddii aad u baahan tahay in qayb dukumeentigan ka mid ah laguugu sharxo kuqaddaada, fadlan sax ku calaamadee sanduuqa oo nagula soo xiriir warqad ama telefoon adigoo isticmaalaya macluumaadka halkan hoose ku yaalla.
- Spanish** Si desea que alguna parte de este documento se traduzca en su idioma, le rogamos marque la casilla correspondiente y que nos contacte bien por escrito o telefónicamente utilizando nuestra información de contacto que encontrará más abajo.
- Tamil** இதுவா அங்கீகரிக்கப்படும் மொழியில் உள்ள பகுதிகளை விளக்க வேண்டுமாயின், கீழ்க்கண்ட மொழியில் உள்ள பகுதிகளை அங்கீகரிக்கப்பட்டுள்ள இடங்களில் குறிப்பிட்டு எழுதி அனுப்பி, அல்லது தொலைபேசியில் தொடர்பு கொள்ளுமாறு கேட்டுக் கொள்கிறோம்.
- Urdu** اگر آپ اس دستاویز کے کسی کا ترجمہ یا زبان میں اس کا تفسیر چاہتے ہیں تو اسے مجھے یا کسی دیگر شخص کا تعلق سے ہمارے ادارے کو خط یا رابطہ پر ہوا تو رابطہ کرنے کے لیے یا ہم سے براہ راست رابطہ کر سکتے ہیں۔

- Large print Braille Audiotape

<p>Your contact:</p> <p>Name.....</p> <p>Address.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Telephone.....</p>	<p>Our Address:</p> <p>Diversity and Community Cohesion Team</p> <p>9th Floor, Civic Centre</p> <p>London Road, Morden</p> <p>SM4 5DX</p> <p>Telephone: 020 8545-3532</p> <p>E-mail: equalityscheme@merton.gov.uk</p>
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Corporate Equality Scheme
For
London Borough of Merton
2010-2013

Consultation draft

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Foreword

To be added

1. Introduction

Merton Council is committed to making Merton a great place to live and call home, where citizens are also neighbours and take responsibility for improving their lives and neighbourhoods, supported by good value local services from Merton Council.

Treating people fairly and valuing diversity and difference is a prerequisite to achieving economic independence and prosperity, social harmony and sustainability.

One of the ways this can be achieved is by promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating unlawful discrimination for all our residents, service users, employees and visitors.

Merton's Corporate Equality Scheme sets out the council's approach to valuing diversity and promoting equality. We aim to ensure we deliver good quality services that meet the needs of all of the borough's communities and help to deliver value for money.

We will address the needs of people who have traditionally faced discrimination or received less favourable treatment based on their age, disability, gender, race and ethnicity, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

We will also address issues like socio-economic, health, educational status and availability of transport and the relationship this has with inequality.

By mainstreaming equality issues into all our policies, service planning and performance management frameworks the scheme demonstrates how equality is an integral part of our strategies and practices.

This is the council's third Corporate Equality Scheme that reflects our ongoing commitment to a generic equality scheme that covers the six equality strands that are recognised in law.

The Corporate Equality Scheme aims to:

- provide direction and leadership in demonstrating the council's commitment to equality;
- influence and promote equality through the Merton Partnership (LSP), the Compact, and work with our stakeholders;
- integrate equalities within our key strategies - in particular the Business Plan, Procurement and Human Resource Strategies;
- further improve service delivery and customer care so that customers receive parity in levels of access, experience, outcomes and satisfaction across all equality groups;
- support the council's work to comply with legislation and codes of practice designed to promote equality;

- set tangible objectives that addresses persistent inequalities and narrows the gap;
- ensure we conduct effective and inclusive consultation and engagement processes across all our functions so that our equality priorities, plans, service design and delivery are informed by our service users and the wider community;
- promote good relations between people of different backgrounds, equality groups and the wider community; and
- achieve a workforce that reflects our diverse population and promotes an inclusive working culture based on respect.

2. About Merton the place

The London borough of Merton is an outer-London borough, situated to the south-west of the capital. Its bordering neighbours are Wandsworth, Sutton, Kingston, Croydon and Lambeth. The borough is mainly suburban in character, and has significant amounts of green spaces, parks and open spaces that offer recreation, relief and contrast to the borough's built environment.

A striking characteristic of the borough is the difference between the poorer more deprived areas in the east of the borough (Mitcham) and the wealthier, more prosperous west (Wimbledon). Bridging the gap between the east and the west of the borough is the major priority for the council, and the overarching theme of our Local Area Agreement (LAA).

2.1 Population

Merton has a population of 199,300 and is the ninth smallest London borough. Merton's population density is above the London average – with a population density of 5,257 people per km², this makes it the fourth most densely populated outer-London borough.

Like many London boroughs, Merton has experienced high rates of migration and population change in recent years. Between 1992 and 2005 Merton had the largest increase in population of any outer-London borough, with the population growing by 13.93%. This growth is predicted to continue, with the population reaching 220,300 by 2025. In particular, the numbers of children and young people and over 85's are predicted to rise.

2.2 Ethnicity

Merton is the 18th most diverse borough in London out of 33 boroughs spread across the capital. 25% of Merton's population is from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups (BAME), and this rises to over 50% in schools. There are significant populations of mixed heritage, Black African, Black Caribbean and Asian origins. Recent figures have shown rises in Sri Lankan, South African and Polish residents. Despite the high levels of population change in the borough, Merton's diversity is a strength, with over 80% of residents agreeing that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

2.3 Age

Merton has a younger population than the England average, with an average age of 36.6 years. The east of the borough in particular has a younger population than the west, with concentrations of young residents in Cricket Green, Figge's Marsh, Longthornton and Pollards Hill. There is less of a pattern for the older population, but the numbers of residents over the age of 55 is increasing steadily, with a projected rise of 39% in the over 85 population by 2028.

2.4 Disability

In Merton 13.8% of residents have a disability or long-term health condition, of which 4.2% receive disability allowance or disability allowance and attendance allowance combined. 1.3% of men are registered as having a disability compared with 1.4% of women. The number of employees with a disability in Merton is 6.9% compared with an average of 4.4% for our 14 comparator boroughs.

2.5 Gender

In Merton 50.4% of the population are female residents and 49.6% are male. There are slightly more male residents in almost every age band category, apart from the age band category in which men and women can retire. 17.3% of the female population are aged 60 and over, compared with 10.2% of males residents aged 65 and over. The female life expectancy in Merton is 83.1 years compared with 79 years for male.

2.6 Religion or Belief

Merton is home to people of many religious faiths and beliefs: 63.3% of Merton residents are Christians, 6% are Muslim, 5% Hindu, 0.8% are Buddhists, 0.5% are Jewish, and 0.3% are Sikh. 16.55% of residents are not religious, which is above the London and England averages. Merton has many places of worship throughout the borough including; churches, mosques, temples and centres. There are also several places of spiritual and religious significance where people go for quiet reflection and meditation.

2.7 Sexual orientation

Merton does have a Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual community, although there is no reliable statistics as to its size. The UK government estimates that between 5% and 7% of the population are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Information from the Office of National Statistics on Same-Sex couples does provide some evidence of numbers of those people in relationships. At 0.34% Merton has the 23rd largest number of people who identify as being in a same-sex couple in England and Wales. Local evidence suggests that although attitudes have changed significantly, people are still reluctant to declare their sexual orientation as lesbian, gay or bisexual because of fear of being treated negatively.

2.8 Deprivation and Prosperity

Merton is the sixth least deprived London borough, and is ranked 222nd nationally (out of 354, where 1 is the most deprived). This relative lack of deprivation does, however, hide inequalities within the borough where pockets of serious deprivation do exist, particularly in the east of the borough. Eight of Merton's super output areas (SOAs) are in the 25% most deprived nationally, and thirteen of Merton's SOAs are in the 20% most income deprived nationally. All are located in the east of the borough.

Although unemployment in the borough is below the national average, 4.6% of the population is unemployed. The difference between the household income of the highest paid ward and the lowest paid ward is £17,521 per annum.

2.9 Community Cohesion and Social Capital

Community cohesion is what happens in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to community cohesion is integration and the relationships that are built to enable new residents and existing residents to feel they belong. Community cohesion can, therefore, be defined as a community where there is a shared future vision and sense of belonging for all. A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity can help to build strong positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

Social capital can be described as the bonds or glue that brings people together, made up of factors such as respect and trust, participation and social engagement, perception and identification, commitment and control, and self-efficacy, which in turn promotes a more cohesive community.

The results from our Annual Residents Survey in 2008 showed the following for the borough:

- 75% of residents felt a strong sense of belonging to their local area;
- levels of satisfaction with the local area as a place to live is high at 82%;
- satisfaction with cultural opportunities in Merton is relatively high at 68%;
- 68% of people feel they are treated with respect and consideration by public services;
- over half the people surveyed (53%) felt they could influence decisions affecting their local area; and
- 85% of residents in Merton felt people from different backgrounds get on well together.

3. About the Council

The borough is made up of 20 electoral wards each one represented by three ward councillors. These 60 councillors are elected every four years. All Councillors meet together regularly as the council, to agree the annual budgets and key plans that make up the council's policy framework. The council also appoints a cabinet each year that has a portfolio of responsibilities under their remit. The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement is the person responsible for equality and community cohesion issues.

All Councillors are required to have due regard to the statutory duties and codes of practice of the council relating to equalities, and to exercise these responsibilities when carrying out their public duties. Merton's code of conduct for councillors specifically requires councillors to recognise the Nolan principles of public life, namely, selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness and leadership, respect for others and, to promote equality of opportunity.

The Council delivers a wide range of services, both directly and indirectly to the whole of the borough as a service provider and service commissioner. It is also the largest single employer in the borough with approximately 5,000 employees, including teachers and school-based staff.

Our services are delivered through the following departments:

Children, Schools and Families Directorate – includes; children's social care services, access to education, early years, inspection and governor support, youth offending, youth service and research function;

Community and Housing – includes; adult social care services, housing policy and services, libraries and leisure services, heritage, and adult education services;

Environment and Regeneration – includes; street scene and waste services, regeneration, parks and open spaces facilities, planning, parking and food safety;

Corporate Services – includes; audit, corporate safety and risk, civic and legal services, communication, finance, customer services, human resources, emergency planning and business continuity, and IT support; and

Chief Executive's – incorporates; corporate policy, strategic partnerships, diversity, community engagement and cohesion, scrutiny, communication, Safer Merton¹, performance and business improvement.

¹ This is the borough's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership

4. Strategic Context

4.1 National Factors

The new **Comprehensive Area Assessment** (CAA) will put the experience of residents, people who use the services, and local taxpayers at the centre of the new local assessment framework, with a particular focus on the needs of those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Reducing inequalities and discriminatory outcomes for all members of the community will be central to the new CAA regime. It will recognise the importance of effective local partnership working, the enhanced role of the Community Plan², and the Local Area Agreement, and the importance of local authorities in leading and shaping the communities they serve.

The introduction of the **Equality Bill** seeks to harmonise all the different discrimination legislations, statutory instruments and regulations and duties into one Single Equality Act. It will mean there will be one single equality duty that will act as a generic duty to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation; promote equality of opportunity for all; and promote good relations between people of different ages, those who are disabled and not disabled, men and women, people of different races and ethnic groups, those of different religions or beliefs, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and heterosexual people. The Equality Bill also proposes a new public sector duty to reduce social economic inequality and provides additional protection to pregnant women, carers and disabled people.

4.2 Local Factors

The development of Merton's Community Plan, negotiation of our Local Area Agreement, and refresh of the Council's Business Plan has created opportunities to establish greater alignment of strategic priorities and objectives. The council recognises excellence can only be achieved by integrating priorities, targets and activity into its business planning processes.

The Community Plan 2009-2019 is the overall plan for the local area. It provides a framework for partners involved in the Local Strategic Partnership to establish priorities and targets for the next three years.

The Community Plan is supported by Merton's Local Area Agreement (LAA), which was approved by central government in 2008, and is refreshed annually. The central theme of the Merton's LAA is 'bridging the gap' which aims to narrow inequalities between the East and West of the borough. Each LAA priority will have a delivery plan that contains activities to support the achievements of these targets.

The Council's Business Plan 2009-2012 is our most important planning document. It sets out the organisations strategic objectives and priorities for

² Merton's Sustainable Communities Strategy

improvement. It is underpinned by annual departmental service plans that describe the activities and targets needed to improve services and outcomes.

4.3 Partnership Working

In working to improve the quality of life, Merton Council recognises the need to work in partnership in effecting and managing the scale of change we anticipate and are planning. The council promotes equality within the Merton Partnership³ and will continue to work jointly with partners to tackle discrimination and promote equality and good relations between people of different racial, cultural, faith and religion, disabilities and gender and age groups. The Merton Partnership has developed an Equality and Diversity Policy that complements the work of this scheme, as well as the borough's Community Plan and Local Area Agreement (LAA).

5. Our Vision

Merton's Council's approach to equality and diversity is driven by its overall vision of Merton – as a great place to live and call home, where citizens are also neighbours and take responsibility for improving their own lives and neighbourhoods, supported by good value local services from Merton Council.

This vision is supported by the strategic themes that are set out in the Council's Business Plan 2009-2012:

Sustainable Communities – improving the environment, housing, economy and transport;

Safer and Stronger Communities – improving community safety and promoting diversity and community cohesion;

Healthier Communities – improving health, promoting well-being and reducing health inequalities;

Older People - engaging constructively with older people so they are able to play a full and active part in the life of the borough;

Children and Young People – improving the lives of children, young people and their families; and

Corporate Capacity – providing effective, value for money services.

Cross-cutting themes include:

Customer access, customer services and customer care – organising what we do and the way we do it around the needs of our customers;

Sustainable development – which reflects the council's role in helping to safeguard the environment;

Equalities, diversity and community cohesion – improving equality of opportunities and outcomes for all of Merton's diverse communities; and

Value for money - providing efficient and effective services with the resources available.

³ Merton's Local Strategic Partnership

These strategic themes are linked to the themes and cross cutting issues in the Community Plan 2009-19 and Local Area Agreement 2008-2011.

6. Our Commitment

Our Equality and Diversity Policy sets out our commitment to:

- promoting equal opportunity, social inclusion and human rights;
- eliminating unlawful discrimination;
- tackling harassment and victimisation;
- promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people and others;
- providing fair, accessible and appropriate services that meet the wide range of needs of everyone in the community;
- employing a diverse workforce at all grades and across all areas of the council;
- promoting good relations between people of different backgrounds between and within the community;
- encouraging participation in, and access to, community and civic life;
- making sure our policies and procedures do not have any unintended adverse impacts; and
- ensuring that our services give satisfaction to all.

The Equality and Diversity Policy (see Appendix 1), together with the Corporate Equality Scheme, sets out clearly what our customers can expect from the council as a community leader, service provider, employer and procurer of goods and services.

7. Achievements and improvements since 2006

During the last three years we have made good progress including:

- the council successfully achieved Level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This was verified by an external assessor from Edge Hill University who, along with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) developed the Equality Standard;
- securing funding for the country's first purpose built intergenerational centre, aimed at providing a range of shared services and facilities under one roof for older people, children and young people is to be built in Eastfields, Mitcham. The centre is due to be opened in December 2009;
- a DVD film featuring independent travel for students with learning disabilities has received a commendation from The Prince Michael of Kent Trust;
- the first local authority to host an ambassadors' programme. The programme focuses on engaging with community organisations and

seeking their support to act as ambassadors to promote Merton as an employer of choice;

- signing the London Child Poverty Pledge with the aim of reducing the proportion of children living in poverty to 17.5% by March 2010;
- a range of third sector organisations has been commissioned by the borough's early intervention, prevention and positive activities strategy, to deliver services that improve outcomes for vulnerable children aged 0-19 years;
- 91% of the borough's schools deliver a full core offer of extended services. This includes increased access to childcare activities, parent support, community facilities and specialist health and social care services;
- established a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Community Forum that is supported by the Police and the Primary Care Trust (PCT);
- increased the opportunities for gay and lesbian people to become foster carers and adopters as a result of a positive advertising and awareness raising campaign and, training of staff in assessment of gay and lesbian people as foster carers;
- Raynes Park High School is the first mainstream Secondary School in England to achieve the National Autistic Society's Accreditation Certificate. The Certificate was awarded for the schools Access Centre, and wider work across the school;
- eight of the borough's 11 designated children's centres are fully operational offering a range of accessible services for children and families. The remaining three are on track for completion by 2010;
- Mitcham Eastfields station was opened in July 2008, significantly improving the transport links to the east of the borough, one of the most deprived parts of Merton;
- the first Gypsy Traveller History Month was celebrated in Merton with an exhibition at the Heritage Centre. A DVD film celebrating the success of Traveller children at secondary school was also launched;
- developed 15 sheltered scheme units for African and Caribbean elders in Mitcham jointly with the London Boroughs' of Croydon and Wandsworth, which opened in 2006;
- achieved 81% of targets in the Ethnic Minority Housing Strategy Action Plan for 2006-2009;
- the Young People Stop Smoking Service was commended for the Health inequalities Award at the 2008 MJ Achievement Awards;
- 61.8% of pupils achieved five or more GCSEs grade A* - C in 2008 - this was the highest improvement rate in the country;
- a race equality action plan in the Youth Justice Service has been developed which, is overseen by the Youth Justice Board and Safer Merton;

- a review of equality impact assessments across the council and the development of an equality impact assessment toolkit;
- facilitating and supporting a number of disabled people to achieve vocational qualifications in management and advocacy;
- our Learning Disability Partnership Board is cited as an example of good practice by the Department of Health for involving disabled people in decision making;
- national Tilley Award finalist for our work in reducing crime related gang activity in 2007;
- put in place a strategy to support schools in meeting their duty to promote community cohesion; and
- Merton's youth services have increased take-up of the service by young women, and have introduced strategies to increase take up by other under represented groups.

8. Our Aim for Equality

Merton Council aims to be a leading authority for promoting equality in local services; an employer of choice for local people; and a place where staff can achieve their full potential. We aim to be accredited as 'excellent' for integrating equality and diversity into all parts of our business activities using the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

The EFLG replaces the Equality Standard in Local Government, which was established in 2001. The new EFLG is designed to reflect recent demographic changes and emerging thinking on the nature of equality and diversity. It has been built on existing work by providing a simpler framework, reducing the amount of process and introducing a more outcome-focussed approach. By integrating public duties on race, disability, gender, including age, religion or belief, and sexual orientation it will provide a common performance framework for compliance, and enable authorities working with the Local Strategic Partnership to identify and analyse their Local Area Agreements (LAA) and delivery plans which are aligned to the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The EFLG consists of five themes, which relates to the new performance regime and Comprehensive Area Assessment. These themes are designed to improve services, life chances and outcomes for local people and are integral to the council's equality priorities, which include:

- knowing our local community and understanding its needs;
- providing strong leadership and partnership;
- engaging with the community and improving satisfaction;
- providing efficient responsive services and excellent customer care; and
- being an exemplary employer with a modern and diverse workforce.

We will use these themes as building blocks for each department to work towards excellence and support the council's aim to be accredited for embedding equality into all business activities as set out below.

We will Know Our Local Community and Understand Its Needs by:

- improving our knowledge and understanding of the community, service users, employees, contractors and partnerships;
- using a range of techniques to collect and analyse equalities profiles of our communities to assess and set equality objectives; and
- monitoring and evaluating equality objectives and outcomes to provide an evidence base for identifying needs and tackling persistent inequalities.

We will Provide Strong Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment by:

- developing equality champions amongst councillors and senior officers;
- setting out a clear vision of equality, which is shared and owned by the council, our partners and the local community;
- having clear organisational and partnership equality priorities that are set and owned by all key stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and community sector;
- establishing a prioritised programme of equality impact assessments by mapping the council's functions and services;
- integrating equality impact assessments into service, partnership, programme and project planning;
- embedding equality and diversity into the development of all employment; procurement; service plans and strategies, including LAA delivery plans; and
- enabling internal and external scrutiny of our own and the Partnership's performance against equality objectives, outcomes and impact.

We will Engage With the Community and Improve Satisfaction by:

- creating accessible and inclusive ways for people to participate in community and civic life;
- celebrating a variety of cultures, lifestyles and faiths within the borough;
- involving and consulting with all our communities, including vulnerable and marginalised groups, before priorities are agreed, to ensure their views are taken into account;
- ensuring effective forums are in place to enable all equality groups, individuals and representatives to challenge, scrutinise and evaluate priorities; and
- ensuring all communications meet the needs and preferences of individuals and can be accessed by all communities and equality groups.

We will Provide Responsive Services and Excellent Customer Care by:

- ensuring service providers have an understanding of different cultures and needs, and customers and citizens are treated with dignity and respect;
- developing systems to collect, analyse and measure data on how all sections of the community are able to access services;
- integrating equality and diversity into tendering, commissioning and contracting processes;
- increasing the role and capacity of the third sector in providing services;
- designing services that take account of the different needs of user groups; and
- monitoring take up of services and complaints to identify negative impact or discrimination.

We will Become an Employer of Choice With a Modern and Diverse Workforce by:

- creating an inclusive workforce reflective of the borough's community;
- understanding the barriers equality groups face to employment and develop strategies to mitigate this;
- operating fair employment practice by reviewing guidance, pay, and terms and conditions to ensure they are fair and address any gaps;
- monitoring and analysing employment data to identify adverse trends in recruitment, promotion, training and development, bullying and harassment and grievance procedures;
- integrating equality and diversity programmes into staff learning and development programmes and appraisal systems; and
- attracting, retaining and developing the diversity of staff at all levels across the council.

9. Our equality priorities as a provider of services

9.1 Developing our priorities

Since 2006, the Council and its partners has organised a number of forums, focus groups and public consultation exercises to understand the needs and concerns of the different diversity groups living in the borough. These have included:

- Staff Survey 2008;
- Annual Residents Survey 2006, 2007 and 2008;
- Young Residents Survey 2006, 2007 and 2008;
- Safer Merton Joint Strategic Assessment 2007 and 2008;
- Merton's Review of Youth Activities 2008;

- Childcare sufficiency assessment 2008;
- Ofsted Tell us Survey in Schools;
- Scrutiny review of youth engagement 2008;
- Older People's Strategy consultation 2007;
- Black and Minority Ethnic Strategy 2007;
- Play and Leisure Survey for children with disabilities 2006;
- Cultural Strategy 2006;
- Merton as an employer of disabled people 2006;
- Gypsy and Traveller conference 2006; and
- Merton's Children's Council and Merton's Youth Parliament.

This information has been used to inform the development of the Corporate Equality Scheme and ensure the activities of the council eliminate discrimination and remove barriers, and are relevant to the issues for these communities.

We have also met with community and faith groups that work on diversity issues to make sure we had input from experts and professionals in this field.

Our priorities were also informed by national and local statistics and research undertaken by the council and other public and statutory authorities on equalities issues.

The priorities identified for the Corporate Equality Scheme 2010-2013 follow the equality strands covered by current equalities legislation. These are set out below.

9.2 Race Equality

The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 was enacted in response to the MacPherson Report recommendations emerging from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry. The Act provides a legal framework for public authorities to promote race equality and eliminate all forms of unlawful discrimination. This means making race equality a central aspect of our activities and decision-making processes.

Merton has long been a borough known for tackling issues of race and equality. Merton's commitment to challenging prejudice and discrimination are a product of its history, responses to social injustices, and the energy of its community and faith leaders. We have established events that celebrate Black History Month; the development of the BME Strategic Plan for Merton, and the establishment of a Joint Consultative Committee with Ethnic Minority Organisations, which together have increased awareness and understanding of race equality.

Whilst we have made significant progress in tackling racial discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity for all Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals and communities in Merton, societal problems still exist.

People from BAME communities still experience multiple inequalities: they are more likely to live in deprived areas, with lower incomes spread across larger household sizes, have less social mobility, and some ethnic groups continue to underachieve in educational attainment at Key Stage 4 (GCSEs). They also continue to experience discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping and racism in employment and service provision, face health and housing inequalities, and are subject to race hate crime and harassment.

Gypsies and Travellers and new immigrants face particularly acute problems in accessing information and services as many public services have low awareness of the needs of these communities.

Our successes to date include:

- narrowing the attainment gap between the borough average and specific ethnic groups by introducing initiatives like 'Black Boys Can' project;
- reducing the number of pupils from BAME groups who are excluded from school;
- improving the school attendance of traveller children through the work of the Traveller Education Service;
- through effective publicity campaigns, increasing the diversity of foster carers to match the needs of the borough's looked after children;
- setting up a Hate Crime Project Management Board to tackle racial incidents and improve reporting;
- celebrating the diversity of the borough through key events like Black History Month, Traveller History Month, Chinese New Year;
- increasing the take up of adult learning amongst BAME people;
- setting up a BAME Housing Forum to understand and address the specific housing needs of BAME residents; and
- increasing our Translation Service provision through drop in sessions at Merton Link.

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- close the school attainment gap for all underachieving groups;
- reduce health inequalities for BAME communities;
- increase the number of volunteers from BAME communities;
- reduce the proportion of pupils from specific ethnic minority groups who are excluded from school;
- increase take up of services provided by Merton's Family Support Team to BAME groups;
- continue to provide support to people whose first language is not English through use of our Translation Service and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes.

- support BAME businesses and organisations;
- celebrate the borough's diversity;
- engage and involve BAME groups and organisations in meaningful dialogue and consultation;
- tackle race hate crime; and
- increase the levels of satisfaction with public services amongst BAME residents.

9.3 Disability Equality

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2005 has placed a 'specific and general duty' on public authorities to actively seek ways to ensure that disabled people are treated fairly and equally in accessing information, in the provision of goods and services, and in employment. In broad terms this means eliminating discrimination and harassment of disabled people, promoting equality of opportunity between disabled people and others, encouraging participation by disabled people in public life, and taking steps to meet the needs of disabled people.

Merton Council recognises its role as an employer and community leader in promoting equality of opportunity towards disabled people. Merton adopts the 'social model of disability' when thinking about the design and access to buildings, transport systems, jobs, and in the provision of goods and services, and social and cultural activity. We are committed to promoting independence, well-being and choice for disabled people by addressing the social and holistic needs of disabled people, rather than focusing on the 'medical model' which only looks at a person's impairment. Merton's aim is for disabled people to be able to contribute to the community as equal citizens.

The definition of a disabled person as set out in the DDA is someone with a 'physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities'. This includes physical impairments such as sight, hearing, heart disease, diabetes and epilepsy, also mental impairment including learning disabilities and mental health problems. Merton Council recognises that people cannot be put into single categories, and that we all identify and define ourselves in different ways. We will work to ensure we do not exclude people on account of unnecessary labelling and categorisation.

Research has shown that disabled people are more likely to experience disadvantage and exclusion from day to day activities because of their impairment. This disadvantage takes place through environmental, attitudinal and organisational barriers created by society. The latest figures from the Office of National Statistics show that the poverty rate among those who are disabled is twice the rate for those who are not.

Our successes to date include:

- increasing the range of accessible resources available for people with disabilities through the Adult Education Service;

- securing funding for specialised housing units for people with mental health problems and learning disabilities in Mitcham;
- creating structures to support the engagement of disabled young people in the decision making process through forums and networks;
- establishing the Your Shout group to give disabled young people a political voice;
- implementing the recommendations from the scrutiny review of Merton as an Employer of Disabled People in 2006;
- ensuring that all children centres in Merton are accessible and compliant with the DDA;
- providing support to all schools to ensure DDA compliance;
- joining the Mencap Pathway London pilot scheme;
- ensuring that GPs in Merton now offer annual health checks to all people with a learning disability in order to overcome the health inequalities highlighted by the government's independent inquiry;
- increasing the number of pupils receiving support for special educational needs (SEN) in Merton with the aim of improving educational outcomes for these pupils;
- introducing a number of DDA adaptations to Merton's public buildings, including;
 - ramps;
 - stairlifts;
 - electronic door opening systems;
 - induction loops; and
 - sign video links systems in the Civic Centre and Chapel Orchard;
- improving our intranet and web-pages facility for disabled users;
- ensuring that all online recruitment packs are available in large print or Braille; and
- running a number of workshops with disabled individuals and voluntary sector groups to explore how the PCT and Merton could improve the support provided to people with a range of long-term disabilities. As a result of this work new support pathways were devised and the development of a user led 'Centre for Independent Living' was proposed.

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- review and improve access to services for disabled people of all ages;
- increase choice and control in the provision of social care and support services;
- increase disability access to and within council buildings, and improve roads and pavements;

- review and improve transport services for disabled people;
- raise the attainment and achievement of children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD);
- increase the participation of children and young people with SEN/LDD in mainstream services;
- implement phased integrated service for children with disabilities;
- increase the access to post-16 provision for disabled young people and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- increase the voice of disabled people in the community through the numbers who vote in local elections and improve representation on the Local Strategic Partnership and in our democratic structures;
- increase the access to post-16 provision for disabled young people and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN);
- increase involvement of disabled people in planning, service design and delivery;
- provide more sport and leisure activity for disabled people;
- create mechanism for engagement with disabled people and external public service providers;
- Increase understanding of disability equality and social model of disability and its application and
- improve housing services for disabled people.

9.4 Gender Equality

We want Merton to be a vibrant, thriving community where all citizens have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and where disadvantage and discrimination are challenged and rooted out.

The Council is committed to combating sex discrimination and sexism and promoting the equality of men and women. Women make up the majority of the borough's population and the Council's workforce and we recognise that, while women and men make a positive contribution to the community, they can experience discrimination, social and economic disadvantage, lack of recognition, inferior status and negative attitudes.

This inequality is experienced across the range of public services - in employment and training, access to services, access and take-up of health care services, protection from crime and domestic violence, and the provision and availability of leisure and cultural activities.

We also recognise that society has stereotypes for both women and men, and both women and men can lose out on opportunities because of these stereotypes.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975, and the Gender Equality Duty introduced in the Equality Act 2006 places a 'general and specific duty' on Merton Council to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment; and
- promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

The Council is also committed to ensuring the rights under the Gender Recognition Act 2005, which ensures the right of transgender people (who have Gender Recognition Certificates) to be recognised in their re-assigned or social gender.

Gender re-assignment is a process which enables people whose gender identity differs from their biological sex to be recognised in their acquired (new) gender. The term 'trans' man/women or 'trans people' is the preferred term used by those people who might be described as broadly falling within this context.

Although the Sex Discrimination Act and the Gender Equality Duty already apply to trans people who have undergone or intend to undergo gender reassignment, the new Equality Bill proposes to broaden this so that gender equality and the gender duty apply to trans people who are not necessarily intending to undergo gender reassignment.

Our successes to date include:

- promoting single sex provision in leisure activity to respect cultural needs;
- developing and commissioning services to address women's safety and domestic violence;
- increasing take up of children's centre services by fathers and lone parents;
- increasing take up of the youth service provision by young women; and
- increasing the number of female councillors involved in local politics in Merton since 2006.

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- work to combat stereotypical attitudes that lead to gender segregation in occupational groups and discrimination in accessing jobs, training and services;
- increase the educational attainment of boys from low income families at all Key Stages, and girls at Key Stage 2;
- increase the take up of youth service provision by Asian young women;
- work in partnership with other organisations to combat sexual harassment and domestic violence;
- increase the take up of youth services by girls and young women;
- ensure trans customers, service users and staff are treated with respect and dignity in accordance with the gender in which they

present, are treated in a non-discriminatory way, and have full access to employment, goods and services;

- celebrate International Women's Day;
- improve the health and well-being of women and men with a focus on reducing health inequalities; and
- increase the safety of young women and young men in the local area.

9.5 Age Equality

We recognise that both younger people and older people face discrimination because of their age. This is largely due to stereotypes and perceptions.

Negative attitudes, assumptions associated with age, and myths about youth and ageing can lead to both younger and older people being socially and economically disadvantaged, excluded and marginalised. We believe that younger and older people have the right to equality of opportunity, and make a significant and valuable contribution to the community.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 outlaws discrimination on the grounds of age in the areas of employment and vocational training. We believe that age equality means securing the equal participation of people of every age across all areas of society, securing a balance between equal citizenship, equality of opportunity and equality of outcome.

Merton is committed to going beyond the requirements set out in legislation to focus proactively on integrating age equality into all areas of the council's work, including employment practice, policy development and service delivery. With an ageing population we believe delivering services to meet the needs of all age groups is a vital mainstream concern, not a marginal 'minority' issue.

Our successes to date include:

- securing funding for the country's first Intergenerational Centre to be built in Mitcham;
- organising a range of events as part of Merton's Celebrating Age Festival for over 50s;
- establishing an Older People's Housing Forum to give older people a voice in housing needs;
- establishing a Youth Parliament and Children's Council to involve young people in local democracy;
- reducing the number of young people who are not in education, training or employment;
- introducing age equality into recruitment and selection training programmes;
- establishing a successful graduate training scheme programme; and
- developing the Hear by Right Standard for engagement with children and young people

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- work to challenge age related stereotypes;
- involve older people and younger people in the development of major council initiatives and policies;
- create opportunities and initiatives that promote greater understanding of, and interaction between, different age groups;
- improve the cohesion among different groups of young people by tackling the negative issues associated with gangs;
- continue to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training;
- increase young people's understanding of local democracy and encourage their participation;
- ensure that the 'participation promise' is implemented in all children's services; and
- improve safety for younger and older people.

9.6 Religion and Belief Equality

We recognise that faith plays an active part in the lives of individuals and communities and is often central to an individual's identity. To hold a religious or other belief is a basic human right that should be treated with respect and tolerance. However, there is still widespread indifference and ignorance towards religion and belief.

Religion and belief is defined as being any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief, such as humanism. It does not include any philosophical or political belief that is not similar to a religion.

The Equality Act (Religion and Belief Regulations) 2007, makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone because of their religion or belief (or because they have no belief). This applies:

- in any aspect of employment;
- when providing goods, facilities and services;
- when providing education;
- in using or disposing of premises; or
- when exercising public functions.

Merton recognises that people can face discrimination because of attitudes in society towards the faith communities to which they belong, and that belittling someone's beliefs or unreasonably promoting your own faith can be offensive.

We also acknowledge that society is becoming increasingly aware of the intricate relationship between faith and religion, race, economic inequality and extremism.

The council is committed to eliminating harassment, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of religion or belief. We recognise our role in promoting understanding, mutual respect and acceptance of diversity between people of faith and no faith.

Our successes to date include:

- respecting religious diversity by, where possible, avoiding setting meeting dates and times that clash with significant dates through use of our Festival of Faiths Calendar;
- implementing advice and guidance to schools on meeting their duty to promote community cohesion;
- through the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE) ensuring schools provide a balanced religious education syllabus;
- establishing an Interfaith Forum that works to promote shared learning and understanding of different faiths and beliefs in Merton;
- involving faith groups in addressing issues as part of our safe-guarding children agenda; and
- delivering Interfaith projects through our community cohesion programmes, such as the Peace Garden in Mitcham, and Faith Awareness Day in libraries.

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- improve communication, involvement and engagement of faith and belief groups across all council activity;
- ensure information is communicated in ways accessible to faith and belief groups in Merton;
- promote better cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and engagement with faith groups and others;
- ensure that schools are meeting their duty to promote community cohesion;
- provide services that are religion and belief-sensitive;
- work to eliminate all forms of religious hatred and harassment and faith hate crime and build a culture of understanding and respect;
- celebrate religious and cultural days and festivals;
- create opportunities for interfaith dialogue in schools and colleges; and
- develop young faith Community Ambassadors.

9.7 Sexual Orientation Equality

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people are represented across every community and equality group in Merton, and they make a significant cultural, social and economic contribution to the borough, yet they face discrimination, victimisation and harassment on multiple levels on the grounds of their sexual

orientation. Negative social attitudes and injustices to LGB people can lead to isolation, exclusion and inequalities in service provision, and employment.

Sexual orientation is the term used to define whom we are attracted to sexually and emotionally. Orientation towards the same sex is commonly referred to as lesbian woman or gay man; orientation towards the opposite sex is commonly referred to as straight or heterosexual; and orientation towards both the same and the opposite sex is commonly referred to as bi-sexual.

Merton is committed to promoting equality of opportunity to all of our diverse residents and communities. We aim to provide accessible and non-discriminatory services that are inclusive of the needs of lesbian, gay and bisexual people. We are committed to tackling homophobic hate crime, harassment and abuse directed towards LGB people. We are also keen to increase the visibility of LGB people to encourage their engagement and participation in public life.

Recent changes in law and have provided the local LGB community with a greater degree of legal protection and has helped to promote their well-being and sense of equality.

The Employment Equality Sexual Orientation Regulations 2003, and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007 makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation in employment, in the provision of goods, facilities and services, in education and in the exercise of public functions.

The Civil Partnership Act 2004, allows same sex couples to make a formal, legal commitment to each other by forming a civil partnership. It also gives rights to same-sex couples that are comparable with those of married couples. This means they are entitled to equitable treatment regarding tax (including inheritance tax), employment and pension benefits, income-related benefits, applying for parental responsibility for the child of a civil partner, and birth and death registration.

Our successes to date include:

- establishing a Lesbian Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community Forum;
- celebrating LGBT History Month in February 2009;
- achieving high satisfaction rates in Civil Partnership ceremonies;
- increasing opportunities for gay and lesbian people to become foster carers and adopters;
- setting up a youth project to support lesbian, gay and bisexual young people;
- simplifying third party reporting procedures to encourage reporting of LGB hate crime;
- increasing diversity monitoring in service provision to establish take-up of services and identify barriers;

- working with the PCT to promote health and well-being amongst LGB people; and
- producing a housing benefit guide for people in same sex relationships.

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- develop more accessible and user-friendly ways of engaging with LGB people;
- tackle and reduce homophobic crime in Merton;
- encourage and support the setting up of support networks and self-organised LGB groups to reduce feelings of isolation;
- equip teachers with the skills and confidence to address homophobic bullying in schools;
- provide better health care provision for LGB people;
- increase visibility of LGB role-models in the community;
- create more opportunities for social activity between LGB people and others;
- improve the collection of data of LGB people in order to access the needs, experiences and volume of LGB service users and employees;
- increase the take-up of youth service provision for young LGB people;
- celebrate LGBT History Month and raise awareness of homophobia as part of International Day Against Homophobia to help change attitudes and behaviours; and
- continue to increase the number of LGB people who are registered as suitable foster carers and adopters.

9.8 Cross-cutting priorities

Socio-economic background: Merton has signed the London Child Poverty Pledge with the aim of reducing the proportion of children living in poverty to 17.5% by March 2010, we are currently at 19.5%. Key to this work is supporting lone parents into employment, reducing the number of socially inactive young people by supporting them into further and higher education and training, reducing teenage pregnancy rates, and increasing childcare provision.

Access to services: Accessing information can be affected by a person's circumstances or condition. Older people, those who are disabled, and people who's first language is not English are likely to face barriers in accessing services compared with other groups. Trend data from council monitoring information provides evidence that these groups are underrepresented in accessing a number of council services, particularly those related to health and recreational services.

Educational attainment: Narrowing the attainment gap between some ethnic groups and their peers, and supporting our most vulnerable groups such as

looked after children, children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those from low income families, to achieve improved educational outcomes remains a key priority in Merton. Raising the educational attainment of white British boys from low income families is a particular area of focus.

Consultation, engagement and participation: Involving local residents and customers is a major part of Merton's policy and decision-making processes. How we engage with communities in order to hear their views about current services and to share ideas on how these can be improved to meet current and emerging needs, is crucial in delivering services tailored to meet diverse customer needs.

Communications and access to information: A crucial part of promoting equality of opportunity is to ensure that communications and information is accessible to all, and is available in the right places at the right times. Feedback from customers, relevant community representatives, and older and disabled people has shown that not knowing about services, opportunities and support, or information being in an inaccessible format, has put them at a disadvantage. A key challenge for the council will be to develop better communication methods that meet the needs of minority groups like disabled people and people whose first language is not English.

Community Cohesion: Merton enjoys strong community relations, with 85% of local people stating that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. The increasing diversity of Merton's communities, particularly in schools, responding to the needs of new and emerging communities, and helping them to integrate with established communities will be a vital role for the council. The threat of extremist activity against a backdrop of increasing tension worldwide will also call for stronger local leadership to help build resilient communities.

Community Safety: Merton has one of the lowest crime rates in London with the area considered a safe place to live. However fear of crime remains one of the top concerns for local people. Young people in particular have concerns about bullying and anti-social behaviour, and many feel unsafe in certain neighbourhoods due to territorial boundaries. We will continue to prioritise support to schools to embed anti-bullying work in their processes. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people, ethnic minorities, disabled people and people with religious backgrounds still report concerns relating to harassment and hate crime, and this will be an area of focus going forward.

Customer Insight: Merton aims to be an organisation that is customer-focussed, with a deep knowledge of our residents and service users so we can understand the breath and depth of their needs. The council is working to serve all our customers equally and having customer insight is of particular importance in achieving this. By developing customer journey maps and using other sources of customer data we will be able to structure our thinking, decision making, service design and delivery to best fit the expectations of our customers. One particular strand of this work is the aim to achieve Customer Services Excellence (CSE) accreditation for all its frontline services by 2011.

10. Our Equality Priorities as an employer

The London Borough of Merton employs approximately 5,535 people including schools-based staff. The Council is constantly changing and adapting to reflect business needs. We recognise that a workforce that is well-led, motivated, developed, diverse, flexible and focused on the services we provide is a key priority for us.

Our annual Workforce Development Plan details the current workforce profile and identifies workforce issues and needs, setting out a medium to long-term strategic direction.

To serve a diverse community well, we recognise that our staff need to come from a wide range of backgrounds that reflect the local community. Our recruitment procedure provides equal opportunities and helps us to have a diverse workforce.

Three quarters of Merton's staff are female, with 59.1% of women in the top 5% salary bracket. In the 2008 staff survey, 76% of respondents agreed that employees at Merton Council are treated fairly regardless of gender.

Our successes to date include:

- being the first local authority to host an Ambassadors Programme, focusing on engaging with community organisations and promoting Merton as an employer of choice;
- increasing the number of staff from BAME backgrounds employed in the council;
- increasing the number of leadership posts within Merton that are occupied by women to 50%;
- achieving a rating of 'significant improvement' in our Workstep provision when inspected by Ofsted;
- implementing Single Status across the council, ensuring equal pay for staff doing the same jobs;
- creating flexible working opportunities for staff and carers;
- ensuring transparent staff progression, secondments and appointments based on skills, experience and knowledge;
- putting in place a comprehensive learning and development programme for staff at all levels in equality and diversity;
- including equality and diversity in induction, appraisals, and team meetings;
- achieving Investors in People (IIP) accreditation;
- achieving Job Centre Plus accreditation;
- achieving Two Ticks accreditation;
- consulting with staff, trade unions and staff support groups;

- introducing comprehensive people management procedures dealing with bullying, harassment and victimisation;
- providing staff support via Occupational Health Services, Mediation and our Employee Assistance Programme;
- supporting staff support groups such as the Disabled Employees Forum, Carers Group, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Network;
- providing clear guidelines on reasonable adjustments to support staff to stay in work should they become disabled;
- developing a Carers Charter;
- including equality impact assessment as part of business planning and budget setting processes;
- joining the Mencap Pathway London pilot scheme 'Workright';
- increasing placements for people with disabilities by having a Mencap Co-ordinator placed in HR to promote job carving;
- seeing an improvement in overall perception of LBM as an organisation that promotes equality of opportunity, values diversity and ensures equal application of policies and procedures in the 2008 Staff Attitude Survey results;
- carrying out an anonymous staff audit to update HR records on diversity indicators;
- producing quarterly workforce data monitoring that is proactively used by Departmental Equality Steering Groups; and
- achieving a percentage of employees with a disability in Merton of 6.9% against an average of 4.4% for our 14 comparator boroughs.

To inform our priority areas for improvement we have gathered evidence from our equality monitoring data, equality impact assessments and consultation with staff, including our staff survey.

Our priorities for the next three years are to:

- re-establish the Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic Staff Group and continue to support all other staff support groups;
- continue to monitor the diversity of the workforce using workforce data, Merton's socio-demographic data, and borough trends;
- continue to promote the Ambassadors Programme to attract a diverse workforce and engage with under-represented groups;
- embed an apprenticeship programme to increase opportunities for young people in the borough and work with partner organisations such as Kingston Merton, Education Business partnership, Connexions, Youth Service and Merton College;
- review current recruitment processes to ensure that it is still relevant, transparent and accessible to all groups;

- continue to embed a culture of embracing diversity through learning and development opportunities;
- maintain our current 'good' rating from the Ofsted Workstep inspection;
- keep up to date with emerging legislation and ensure employees understand their obligations through learning and development activities;
- ensure that positive images of older people and an age diverse workforce are promoted in the workplace;
- achieve customer excellence through embedding a culture which embraces and includes all aspects of diversity in service delivery; and
- recognise that Merton's diverse workforce will have different faiths and beliefs and ensure that HR policies take these into account.

11. How we will achieve these priorities

11.1 Responsibilities

Merton's elected Members have overall responsibility for the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme. The cabinet member for Community Safety and Engagement has the executive responsibility for promoting equality and diversity across the partnership and all council services, including those delivered on its behalf by businesses, voluntary, community and faith organisations.

Our corporate management team and project management boards will have responsibility for the strategic implementation of the Scheme, including making sure that equalities is central to all work done by the council, communicating and promoting the Corporate Equality Scheme to others inside and outside the council, setting out what we aim to achieve in terms of equality and diversity, and holding departments to account through performance reviews. Departmental teams will be responsible for the delivery of the Corporate Equality Scheme, through service, teams and personal development plans.

All managers must be familiar with the Scheme and be responsible for ensuring equality and diversity is an integral part of any policy development, service design and delivery, employment practices; and procuring and commissioning of goods and services.

All staff including those we work in partnership with, and who are contracted or commissioned to work on our behalf, have a responsibility to promote equality; eliminate discrimination in their day to day work, and recognise and respect the different backgrounds and circumstances of people.

11.2 Core processes

The Council has adopted a structured approach that systematically integrates equality and diversity into its main business planning activities among all staff at

all levels, and with those working in partnership and providing goods and services on our behalf. The council will strive for excellence through the rigorous implementation of the Equality Framework for Local Government.

Merton’s Corporate Equality Scheme will be translated into action plans at corporate and departmental level and will be integrated into other policies and plans for service delivery, employment and partnership working.

12 Our specific legal duties

Under current race, disability and gender anti-discrimination legislation we have a ‘general duty’ to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and good community relations between people of different backgrounds. This general duty is supported by a number of ‘specific duties’. These duties require us to set out our arrangements for:

- how we involve different equality groups in developing the Scheme;
- identifying relevant policies, functions and services that are equality relevant across the six equality strands;
- assessing and consulting on the likely impact of existing and proposed policies, functions and services;
- monitoring policies, services and functions for adverse impact, including workforce data;
- publishing consultations and assessment results;
- ensuring public access to service information and to services;
- training staff to understand equality implications;
- procuring goods and services; and
- monitoring and reviewing the Corporate Equality Scheme.

Our approach to each of these is set out in the table below.

Duty	Arrangements
Involving people in producing the scheme	Merton has a statutory duty to engage and involve people (particularly those who have a disability) in the development of this Corporate Equality Scheme. In producing this document the council has worked with equality organisations within the voluntary and community sector and members of the public who identify themselves as being from a recognised equalities group to ensure the priorities for the council and the actions that arise from these are relevant and will address their needs and concerns.
Identifying relevant policies and functions	In accordance with the requirements of relevant anti-discrimination legislation Merton has assessed its policies, functions and services for their relevance to promoting and delivering equality of opportunity in relation to race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief through its service and policy reviews, equality impact assessments, and

	<p>internal audit processes. However, it is recognised that the degree of relevancy will not necessarily be the same across all the six equality strands.</p>
<p>Assessing and consulting on likely impact of policies, functions and services</p>	<p>Over the next three years, we will use numerous tools such as scrutiny reviews, service monitoring and surveys, focus and forum group meetings, our Annual Residents Survey and Young People’s Survey, Resident Panels, Partnership Boards, and network groups to consult with customers and residents on existing and proposed new policies, functions and services.</p> <p>We will also make effective use of relevant information including population and census data, benchmark authorities with similar policies, survey results, equality and customer data and commissioned research.</p> <p>We will ensure all new and significantly changing policies, functions and services are subject to a rigorous Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process to identify any adverse impact on the promotion of equality and community cohesion.</p> <p>We will make managers responsible for ensuring EIAs are carried out routinely and pro-actively on existing policies and when changes take place. The council’s service planning template explicitly requires managers to address equalities when reviewing their service and resource plans.</p> <p>Every year we will review our EIA policy, assess our findings and monitor progress.</p>
<p>Monitoring policies, functions and services for adverse impact</p>	<p>Knowing whether the Council’s policies, functions and services are achieving the aims of the Corporate Equality Scheme is largely dependant on having efficient, up to date and relevant monitoring systems in place.</p> <p>Heads of Service will be responsible for the collection, monitoring and analysis of equality data to ensure that any adverse impacts are dealt with as quickly as possible at service level.</p> <p>All Departments will produce regular progress reports that will tell us what actions have been taken to address any inequalities. This information will be shared with relevant partners through a range of protocols to improve knowledge of the community and enable all agencies to respond more effectively to local needs.</p> <p>We will regularly monitor our employment policies and practices to make sure we put our commitment to equality and diversity into practice and identify if there are any adverse impacts on different equality groups.</p> <p>Our workforce profile will include monitoring of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ job applications; ▪ promotions;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ performance; ▪ the reason for staff leaving; ▪ training and; ▪ our disciplinary and grievance procedures; and ▪ staff survey results.
<p>Publishing consultations and assessment results</p>	<p>The results of consultations will be communicated to service users and residents in accordance with the Council's Consultation and Involvement Strategy. Information will be communicated using a range of different media's including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'My Merton' magazine; ▪ Merton's website; ▪ the local Guardian newspaper; ▪ JC DeCaux and other posters and banners; and ▪ postcards, leaflets and newsletters. <p>The results of EIAs carried out each year will be summarised and published in an annual report to Elected Members on the Council's equality performance. This will also be published on the Council website. Departmental equality action plans that are developed as a result of the assessment process will be available upon request.</p>
<p>Ensuring public access to service information and services</p>	<p>Merton has a Communications Strategy and is developing an Involvement Strategy that together articulate the Council's aim to inform and engage with internal and external customers in an open and transparent way by providing accurate, timely, accessible and relevant information.</p> <p>The council's Inclusive Consultation Strategy is an integral part of ensuring the public are able to access information and services in appropriate formats and languages. The strategy provides guidance to officers on how to respond to and initiate contact with people with differing needs.</p> <p>The council also has written and visual style guides for the production of letters, leaflets, posters and web-page design.</p>
<p>Training staff to understand equality implications</p>	<p>The council is committed to mainstreaming equality and diversity into all council activity and promoting equality of opportunity and good community relations. All staff will be required to attend diversity, cultural awareness and disability awareness training programmes so they have an understanding of how equalities fits into the council's overall business priorities and there day to day work.</p> <p>Those staff involved in the consultation, design and assessment of policies, functions and services will be given training and support in completing EIAs so they are aware of their responsibilities in response to equalities legislation.</p>
<p>Procuring</p>	<p>Merton is committed to ensuring that those contractors whom</p>

<p>Services</p>	<p>we procure goods and services from and we commission services to, share and implement our equality vision and values.</p> <p>As part of our Contract Standing Orders procedures we will expect contractors and suppliers to demonstrate that all practicable steps are being taken to eliminate discrimination, promote equal access and equal treatment in employment, and service delivery for all and promote good community relations.</p>
<p>Monitoring and Reviewing the Corporate Equality Scheme</p>	<p>The Corporate Equality Scheme identifies a number of actions, which will be monitored on a regular basis. Our performance will be reported annually to elected Members through our Executive Committee, and communicated to the Council's Chief Officers through the Corporate Management Team, which will be cascaded down to Heads of Service and Divisional Managers. The annual report of our equalities performance will be published on our website.</p> <p>The Scheme will be reviewed regularly to keep it current and relevant to Merton's communities. It will also be reviewed in light of future legislation.</p>

Appendix I

Equality and Diversity Statement and Policy

Policy Statement

Merton Council is committed to promoting equal opportunity and valuing diversity in the community, as an employer and as a provider of services to the people of the borough and its visitors.

The London Borough of Merton is committed to carrying out our legal responsibilities including:

- promoting equal opportunities, social inclusion and human rights;
- eliminating unlawful discrimination and disadvantage;
- eliminating harassment and victimisation;
- promoting a positive attitude towards people of different backgrounds, disabled people and others;
- encouraging participation by people of all backgrounds in public life;
- valuing diversity and promoting good relations between individuals, communities and employees of all backgrounds; and
- taking the necessary steps towards meeting the needs of disabled people and others.

Our Aims and Values

As a **Community Leader** we are committed to creating a socially inclusive and cohesive community by:

- working with others to ensure that Merton is a safe place in which to live, work, study or visit;
- promoting equal opportunity and equal access to employment, services, information and facilities;
- listening and responding to the views of our communities through appropriate and widespread consultation and participation mechanisms which are accessible to all;
- encouraging and supporting people to be active in social, cultural and political life;
- ensuring the information we produce and the events we hold positively reflect and promote the diversity of our communities; and
- ensuring organisations and businesses that provide goods and service on behalf of Council have appropriate equality procedures in place.

As a **Service Provider** we are committed to ensuring that our services are responsive and accessible to all by:

- providing fair and appropriate services that meet the wide range of needs of everyone in the community;
- making it easy for, and encouraging people to use our services, including people who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or harder to reach;
- ensuring our buildings and open spaces are accessible to everyone, making reasonable adjustments were appropriate;
- consulting and involving all sections of our community in the design, development and monitoring of our policies and services;
- monitoring take-up and evaluating services to ensure they do not discriminate or exclude individuals or groups;
- making sure our policies and procedures for giving grants, and for commissioning and buying in goods and services follow this policy; and
- making sure that we always consider equality and diversity when planning and delivering services.

As an **Employer** we value the diversity of our workforce and are committed to ensuring fair practice in employment by:

- making sure our workforce is representative of the local community;
- ensuring recruitment and selection processes are non-discriminatory and encouraging applications from all groups in the community;
- providing a safe and accessible working environment that values and respects the identity and culture of each person;
- creating a culture and working environment free from discrimination, harassment and bullying;
- ensuring that all staff has access to learning and development opportunities so that their contribution and potential are maximised;
- supporting disabled staff to carryout their work and making reasonable adjustments where appropriate to do so;
- applying fair and equitable processes to pay and reward schemes, ensuring equal pay for equal work;
- providing support and training on equality and diversity to all our employees and Councillors; and
- monitoring the diversity of the workforce with regard to race, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation and religion and belief, and salary.

Monitoring the policy

- This policy forms part of the Corporate Equality Scheme (CES). To measure the effectiveness of this policy, we will monitor service targets and employment practices taking action where necessary.
- The Corporate Equality Steering Group, the Corporate Management Team, and Councillors will monitor the CES in line with the Performance Management Framework.

Merton's Corporate Equality Scheme 2010-2013 Consultation

Consultation response form

You are welcome to use this form to record any comments or observations you would like to make in response to the consultation document. Please note that use of this form is not obligatory – responses are welcome in any format.

Consultation Question :1

Do you think we have set the right priorities for Merton Council to focus on over the next three years? If not what else should we focus on?

Consultation Question: 2

Are there any other issues you think should be included in this Corporate Equality Scheme?

Consultation Question: 3

What else do you think we can do to promote equality of opportunity in the workplace and as an employer of choice for local people?

Consultation Question: 4

Merton Council is currently developing an Action Plan with objectives set against the priorities. What objectives or actions would you like to see included?

Consultation Question: 5

Do you have any other comments you would like to make about this draft Corporate Equality Scheme?

Please send your responses by e-mail to:
equalityscheme@merton.gov.uk

Or by post to:

Diversity and Community Cohesion Team
Chief Executive's Department
9th Floor, Merton Civic Centre
London Road, Morden
SM4 5DX

Name:	
Organisation: (if applicable)	
Address:	
E-mail address:	