



# **Corporate Equality Scheme 2011 to 2016**

## **Consultation Results**

**Prepared by Sara Cook, Project Manager (September 2011)**

**Epsom & Ewell Borough Council  
Town Hall  
The Parade  
Epsom  
Surrey KT18 5BY**

## Contents

---

<b>1. Purpose of the Corporate Equality Scheme Consultation .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Methodology .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3. Results.....</b>	<b>4</b>
Section 1: Corporate Equality Scheme 2011 to 2016 .....	4
1. With regard to the format / layout of the Corporate Equality Scheme itself, please state your level of agreement / disagreement with the following statements: .....	4
2. What improvements, if any, could be made to the format / layout of this document?.....	4
3. Is there anything else that you would add, or expect to find included, in the Corporate Equality Scheme? .....	5
Section 2: Having read the action plan for delivering the Corporate Equality Scheme .....	6
4. With regard to the format / layout for the supporting action plan, please state your level of agreement / disagreement with the following statements: .....	6
5. Are there any other actions that you would like to add, or expect to find included in the action plan? .....	6
6. What actions do you think should be considered from January 2013 to the remainder of the Corporate Equality Scheme? .....	7
Section 3: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Performance.....	7
7. Are you aware of any barriers to (anything to prevent) accessing Council's services against the nine protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity)?.....	7
8. If 'yes', please detail what these barriers are.....	7
9. How would you rate the Council's current performance on equality issues?.....	8
10. Please state the reason for your response. ....	8
Section 4: Share your views .....	9
11. Is there anything else you would like to add? .....	9
Section 5: About You.....	10
<b>4. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>10</b>

## **1. Purpose of the Corporate Equality Scheme Consultation**

---

The purpose of the consultation was to establish views on the draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2011 to 2016 and its supporting Action Plan. The purpose of the Scheme is to ensure that the Council can achieve greater equality within the organisation with regard to employment and service delivery in the next few years.

## **2. Methodology**

---

Consultation on the draft Corporate Equality Scheme commenced on 20 July 2011 and lasted until Tuesday 30 August 2011. The draft Scheme and proposed action plan were made available on the Council's website, with a "Quick Link" from the Council's homepage. Copies were also emailed to members of the Epsom & Ewell Equalities Forum, staff, Councillors and other interested parties such as members of the Local Strategic Partnership and people who have participated in Local Strategic Partnership conferences and events. The consultation was sent directly to approximately 160 individuals, excluding staff and Councillors.

Members of the Equalities Forum were asked in its first meeting in March 2011 to highlight any issues they have experienced, so this could be fed into the development of the Scheme and action plan. In its next meeting at the end of June, its meeting included an agenda item on the draft Scheme and Action Plan. Various actions were proposed at this meeting, which also helped to identify any potential gaps.

People could respond in a number of ways:

- Completing a web-based survey (designed using SNAP 10 survey software).
- Emailing the Council.
- Sending postal comments to the Council.
- Telephoning the Council.

There was also coverage in the local media and in Borough Insight to publicise the consultation.

### 3. Results

---

16 people completed the web-based Corporate Equality Scheme consultation survey. Three people provided comments individually via email. These comments have not been included in this results report, but their comments have been incorporated into the final version of the Corporate Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

#### Section 1: Corporate Equality Scheme 2011 to 2016

1. With regard to the format / layout of the Corporate Equality Scheme itself, please state your level of agreement / disagreement with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
The document is easy to read	13.3	73.3	13.3	0
The content of the document is easy to understand	6.3	81.3	12.5	0
The structure of the content is easy to follow	6.3	93.8	0	0
The wording of the document makes sense	7	74	20	0
The summary (pages 3 and 4) sufficiently explains the Corporate Equality Scheme	7.1	78.6	14.3	0
The information is presented in the best format possible to make it understandable to the reader	7.1	71.4	21.4	0

Base: 16 responses

2. What improvements, if any, could be made to the format / layout of this document?

#### Positive Comments

- This is very easy to read. This sort of document is always cumbersome but it definitely makes sense.
- I think it is clear and well laid out so I believe it is effect in its aims.
- None (x2).
- None - it's extremely well written and the author and contributors should receive congratulations.

### Negative Comments

- Too long and wordy.
- Shorten the document - it's too long.
- Some of the wording is difficult to understand. If English was my 2nd language I would not be able to understand quite a few words and also the context in which they are written. My access to this document would be really quite limited
- Clearer spacing of lines and separate sections, use of fonts.
- Reduce the word count to 4000 words or less.
- Use bubble diagrams.
- Some elements need to be standardised, including - bullet point format and txt at bottom of page 9 (font size). I think the text would look neater if all paragraphs had a 'hanging indent'. Some text is little inaccessible - for example: "We want what we do to achieve equality of opportunity and the valuing of diversity to be open and transparent to all members of our community. We want it to be driven by people in our Borough, in particular those who have an interest in eliminating discrimination, furthering equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between the diverse groups in our community." is a little text heavy?
- More visual, case study / evidence examples, where plans / targets / timescale?
- Item 1, bullet point 1 page 3, elaborate a bit on how information will be gathered and who will decide what information is required. Bullet point 3, there must be many employees with local knowledge too, not just councillors. Item 4 bullet point 1, account must be taken of those with literacy problems, particularly those from the Gypsy community. Bullet point 3, very important issue.
- Instead of putting it all under a number of subheadings, categorise it in sections and put the main points in bullets points with examples where possible.
- None. The document should never have been issued. See final comments.

### **3. Is there anything else that you would add, or expect to find included, in the Corporate Equality Scheme?**

- As a Corporate scheme I would have (reasonably) assumed that there would be cross-reference to its application by the Council's different services - for example, the Policy Team applying aspects of the scheme in their work with the LSP and other partners. This is a notable omission.
- Whilst there are assurances that compliance will be carried out within existing resources and external funding will be sought where possible, is it realistic not to refer to the extreme cuts local authorities are facing and that there will be inevitable occasions where cost will be a factor in not providing the service at the levels we strive for.
- Not sure if Travellers should be included. Housing needs not reflected Mental Health and Social Care - can't remember if this was covered? Well it was a very large document to read and take on in one hit! NEETs not mentioned.
- Since this is a document primarily aimed at fulfilling legal obligation it appears to fulfil its stated aims.
- How do the council's Key Priorities link in to the Equality Scheme? Maybe they don't have to? I can see how it would link in to the Core Values.
- No comment.
- No (x5).
- No. See final comments

- Can't think of anything
- As repeated.

## Section 2: Having read the action plan for delivering the Corporate Equality Scheme

4. With regard to the format / layout for the supporting action plan, please state your level of agreement / disagreement with the following statements:

Statement	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
The actions are easy to understand	12.5	75	12.5	0
The content of the action is easy to understand	12.5	68.8	18.8	0
The desired outcomes of delivering the actions are easy to understand	6.3	68.8	25	0
The proposed actions give reasonable weight to all of the protected characteristics	12.5	68.8	12.5	6.3
The structure and content is easy to follow	12.5	68.8	18.8	0
The wording of the actions make sense	6.3	75	18.8	0
The information is presented in the best format possible to make it understandable for the reader	12.5	56.3	31.3	0

Base: 16 responses

5. Are there any other actions that you would like to add, or expect to find included in the action plan?

- Perhaps reference to how equalities will be fully met for staff being made redundant.
- One of the questions you asked in the previous section I could not understand fully - so marked it as Strongly disagree.
- Identification of which up and coming new activities will have EIA's.
- None to add. I find the current list a little difficult to understand - a lot of Outcomes/actions use quite 'academic' language and perhaps could be simplified if to be of more relevance to lower-level employees of the Council. The Outcomes/actions/timescales/owners aren't aligned correctly on the version I read, so it can be a little awkward to work out who is doing what. Overall, the Plan makes me feel it is a document for the attention of senior management, not employees from all levels of the organisation. Also, if the Action Plan is intended for the attention of external parties, it should list officer job titles, not simply names.
- Item 21 bullet 3 is important for all ethnic groups. At present Gypsies are not required to

be monitored, for example, by Housing department. Therefore makes it difficult to determine Equalities impact.

- Education.
- None (x5).
- Not especially - equality policies only work when they are embedded in everyday functioning!
- No. See final comments.
- Sorry I was unable to read this as it appeared to be in text speak.

## **6. What actions do you think should be considered from January 2013 to the remainder of the Corporate Equality Scheme?**

- Exit Interviews and why staff leave should be taken seriously - that way the organisation should be able to pick up the true bullying and harassment that takes place under the radar - exit interviews do not seem to identify where bullying is taking place.
- Promoting greater public awareness of equality issues and policies - many residents still regard this area as an unnecessary waste of time and public money at best, and have no real interest in it beyond protecting their own position.
- None. See final comments.
- Need to discuss via the group meeting e.g. Epsom & Ewell Access group, local charities working with disabled / deaf people.
- Presumably to see where we have got with the Action Plan? Revisit the Equality Impact Assessments?
- How to help people who will be affected by different strands of the new regulations that will be put in practice.
- Projecting what the borough will look like in 5 year's time.
- Not sure (x 3).
- None (x 4).

## **Section 3: Epsom & Ewell Borough Council's Performance**

### **7. Are you aware of any barriers to (anything to prevent) accessing Council's services against the nine protected characteristics (gender, ethnicity, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity)?**

4 respondents (25%) indicated that they were aware of barriers; 1 respondent (6.3%) indicated they were unsure.

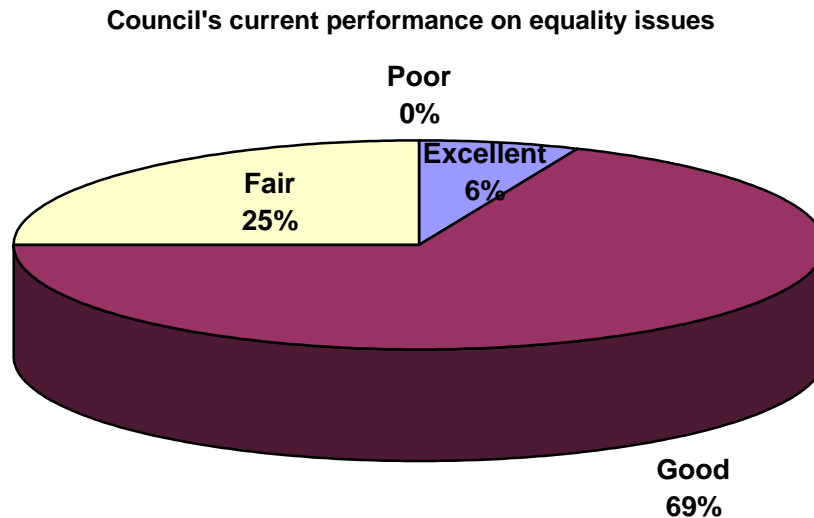
### **8. If 'yes', please detail what these barriers are.**

- Financial resources to allow Translation of Corporate Documents.
- No BSL interpreters provided.
- Gypsies/Travellers have traditionally had an aversion to those "in authority" be they police, social workers, local authorities and this could have an effect on their accessing services to which they are entitled. It is not such a problem with those who are in settled accommodation or on static sites. I do know that residents on the local site have not

received copies of Insight.

- Language. A majority of people in the ethnic minority cannot speak English.

### 9. How would you rate the Council's current performance on equality issues?



Base: 15 responses

Over two thirds of respondents (69%) thought the Council's current performance on equality issues was good; and one quarter thought it was fair. None of the respondent thought the Council's performance was poor.

### 10. Please state the reason for your response.

- I have never heard anything to their detriment.
- Too early to have a useful opinion.
- I have witnessed some inequality (albeit not at Officer level) in relation to religious belief and ethnicity.
- Good - because the Council has made good progress with community engagement, and the equalities group. Not excellent because the policy finalisation seems to be quite late compared to when the legislation came into force.
- Managers and staff strive for a high level of service to customers and this naturally incorporates responding to the differing needs of individuals.
- Sorry, but I do not want to answer this question and object to having to give you an answer - it is personal.
- I always been treated fairly.
- All the Council can do is comply with and promote the legal requirements, and the document achieves this well.
- I have worked for the Council for many years and have not been made aware of any case where services were withheld or grudgingly delivered because of prejudice.
- I see progress being made but still some challenges for the council in interfacing with

harder to reach people and people of various cultural backgrounds particularly in the regulatory sphere where for example, the written word may not carry as much weight as the council thinks.

- I know we have invested a lot of time and money making sure our services are open to all.
- Specifically: provision of BSL interpreters for deaf (previous) Councillor was good. I feel we try very hard to make our services available to all residents.
- I am very surprised to read Epsom Guardian that the Council got the award certificate from RNID to provide excellent services to deaf and hard of hearing people. I know one receptionist learnt basis BSL but not sure about employing deaf people, minicom number, so on.
- I'm not sure how many members of staff are aware of the Equalities Act or how it impacts on their job. This work being done now should help. I have myself been aware of "institutionalised racism" in the past.
- Bad experiences expressed by people in the community.
- there is a lot of documentation, training and available advice in place to support the strategy.

## Section 4: Share your views

### 11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

16 respondents provided comments.

- What is the Equalities Forum? I've never heard of it
- Regretfully there are those customers who blame not getting the response they want on their categorisation as being within a particular group. Staff must be fully supported against such accusations where they are unfounded. Errors will be made - again staff should be assisted with further training and learning opportunities where deficiencies in knowledge and/or delivery methods are identified.
- I feel that this questionnaire is leading me to give you the answers you want.
- Only that far too many people regard themselves today as part of a 'victimised minority'. Of course some are, but most of us in this Borough are very fortunate and blessed in many ways. A much greater sense of being aware of the needs and concerns of others needs to be promoted among all.
- To be honest, I think that this document says more about what is wrong with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council than it does about the merits of equality. At a time when services are being cut and staff over-stretched, a senior officer has been instructed to waste her time writing 23 pages of well-crafted, lucid text on a completely unnecessary subject in order to solve a problem that didn't exist in the first place. Is this so that other staff can be reminded of the importance of their department? I have a lot of confidence in my colleagues, who are (including the author of this document!) decent hard-working people with higher-than-usual ethical standards and who are quite capable of dealing with all members of the public in a fair and unprejudiced fashion - without paperwork. Schemes and strategies are just fleas on the dog: it's a sign of sturdiness in the organisation that we can function despite their proliferation, but they don't actually add to our health.
- If my department is a reflection on the council as a whole there is a perceived reluctance by colleagues to get involved with this consultation. Pity, as it's an important issue.
- More reliable and realistic means of getting the message to people who are reluctant to

- access the services offered due to different barriers.
- No (x9).

## Section 5: About You

- All respondents responded as an individual, as opposed to on behalf of an organisation.
- 68.8% of respondents (11 individuals) were male.
- Respondents were all aged 25 and over.
- 31% of respondents said they had a disability according to the Equality Act. *The Equality Act 2010 states that “a person has a disability for the purposes of the Act if he / she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his / her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”*
- 2 respondents (12.5%) said they would prefer not to say if they live and work in the gender that is different from the one assigned to them at birth.
- 56.3% of respondents (9 individuals) said they were married or in a civil partnership.
- 1 respondent (6.3%) indicated they were from an ethnic minority group (Bangladeshi) and one from ‘any other white background’; and one preferred not to say.
- The survey captured views from different religions / beliefs (1 respondent was Buddhist; 8 Christian; 1 Muslim; 3 stated no religion; 1 preferred not to say; 1 stated ‘Lutheran’ and one stated other but did not state what.
- 1 respondent (6.7%) indicated they were a gay woman / lesbian; 1 preferred not to say; and 2 indicated ‘other’ for sexual orientation.

## 4. Conclusions

---

Whilst the number of responses for this consultation was low, analysis of responses shows that the Corporate Equalities Scheme and action for delivery were relatively well received by those who chose to complete the web-based survey. The majority of respondents thought the Scheme was easy to read and understand, its content easy to follow, the summary sufficiently explained the Scheme, and the information was presented in the best format possible to make it understandable to the reader.

The majority of respondents also felt the action plan was easy to read, content and desired outcomes were easy to understand, that the proposed actions gave reasonable weight to all of the protected characteristics, and that the wording made sense.

The consultation did however show that improvements could be made to the Scheme itself, its layout as well as ensuring the information is presented in the best format possible to make it understandable to the reader.

Following the consultation, changes to the Scheme included:

- Reducing the length by putting much of the background information into an Appendix.
- Improving the layout of the Scheme.
- Improving the layout of the action plan.
- Adding responsible Officer job titles to the action plan.

It was not considered appropriate to make the wording easier to understand for those who, for example, may have English as a second language. Most strategies are by their very nature written in business language, and the nature of the Equality Act 2010 and the specific and general duties it requires would have made this very challenging. Producing the document in an Easy Read format was explored, but this is an expensive option for the Council to pursue.

It was reassuring to see that the Council's current performance on equality issues was 'good': 1 respondents said it was excellent, 11 good and 4 fair. No respondents indicated that it was poor. 4 respondents did however indicate that they were aware of barriers to (anything to prevent) accessing the Council's services against the nine protected characteristics. Two of these comments related to the resources available to the Council in terms of being able to provide translated copies of corporate documents and British Sign Language interpreters; one being about language and that the majority of people in the ethnic minority cannot speak English (this could have links to the resources available to the Council for e.g. translations); and the last comment regarding gypsies and travellers and the potential for this group to have an aversion to those "in authority" which could have an effect on their accessing services to which they are entitled.

Where possible, the action plan will seek to address some of these issues identified. Members of the Equalities Forum have also been asked to alert the Forum to any issues that they come across to ensure that such information is captured and acted upon (where appropriate).

As part of this consultation process, potential actions from January 2013 for the remaining period of the Scheme have been captured. These suggestions, along with input from the Equalities Forum closer to the time, will ensure that the Scheme and actions are relevant to different sections of the community for its duration.