

# Gender Equality Scheme

## 2007-2010

**DRAFT**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview of the Scheme

This scheme has been written to ensure that the needs of men and women are taken into account in the Council's service delivery and employment functions. It sets out the Council's legal duties as well as providing information on our current practices in relation to gender equality and arrangements for consultation. In writing this Strategy, the Council will consider;

- The differing experiences of men and women in Dartford
- The experience of male and female employees
- How to make services more effective

The Scheme also includes a three year action plan which sets out the practical steps we will take to meet our duties and promote gender equality.

## 1.2 The General Duty

The general duty applies to the Council when it carries out its functions. The Council must give 'due regard' to the need to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination
- Eliminating harassment
- Promoting equality of opportunity between men and women

## 1.3 The Specific Duties

Under the specific duties of the Act, Dartford Council must prepare and publish a Gender Equality Scheme showing how it intends to fulfil the general and specific duties and setting out its gender equality objectives. The Council must;

- in preparing a scheme:
  - consult employees, service users and others (including trade unions)
  - take into account any information it has gathered or considers relevant as to how its policies and practices affect gender equality in the workplace and in the delivery of its services
  - in formulating its overall gender equality objectives, consider the need to have objectives to address the causes of any gender pay gap
- ensure that the scheme sets out the actions the authority has taken or intends to take to –
  - gather information on the effect of its policies and practices on men and women, in employment, services and performance of its functions

- use the information to review the implementation of the scheme objectives
- assess the impact of its current and future policies and practices on gender equality
- consult relevant employees, service users and others (including trade unions)
- ensure implementation of the scheme objectives
- implement the scheme and their actions for gathering and using information within three years of publication of the scheme, unless it is unreasonable or impracticable to do so
- review and revise the scheme at least every three years
- report on progress annually

## **1.4 Understanding Gender Equality**

The term 'sex' is used to describe biological differences between women and men. The term 'gender' refers to the wider social roles and relationships which structure men's and women's lives. Gender inequality exists in all aspects of society and refers to lasting and embedded patterns of advantage and disadvantage.

In order to achieve actual equality of opportunity, it is necessary to recognise that in certain circumstances women and men, because of their sex or gender roles, are not in the same position. In some circumstances it may therefore be appropriate to treat women and men differently, if that action is aimed at overcoming previous disadvantage.

The promotion of equal opportunities between men and women requires public authorities to recognise that the two groups are not starting from an equal footing and identical treatment would not be appropriate.

In addition, the gender equality duty requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment against transsexual people in the fields of employment and vocational training.

Having due regard means that the weight given to the need to promote gender equality, is proportionate to its relevance to a particular function. In practice, this principle will mean public authorities should prioritise action to address the most significant gender inequalities within their remit, and take actions which are likely to deliver the best gender equality outcomes.

## 2. Local Context

### 2.1 About Dartford

**Population:** In Dartford the population estimates for mid-2003 were 86,200 people, of whom 49 per cent were male and 51 per cent were female. This compared with the overall figures for England and Wales of 49 per cent male and 51 per cent female.

**Allowances:**

Percentage of benefit claimants who are **women**

	<b>Dartford</b>	<b>South East</b>	<b>England</b>
Income Support Claimants (Aug 05)	68%	65%	64%
Job Seekers Allowance Claimants (Aug 05)	32%	28%	28%
Disability Living Allowance Claimants (Aug 05)	48%	49%	49%
Incapacity Benefit / Severe Disablement Allowance Claimants (May 06)	41%	42%	42%

Percentage of benefit claimants who are **men**

	<b>Dartford</b>	<b>South East</b>	<b>England</b>
Income Support Claimants (Aug 05)	31%	35%	36%
Job Seekers Allowance Claimants (Aug 05)	68%	72%	72%
Disability Living Allowance Claimants (Aug 05)	52%	51%	51%
Incapacity Benefit / Severe Disablement Allowance Claimants (May 06)	59%	58%	58%

The figures show that in Dartford there is a higher percentage of women claiming income support and JSA than in the South East and England, whereas for men there was a lower percentage in both cases. Claimants of DLA and incapacity benefit were broadly similar to the national average for both men and women.

**Safety:** Domestic violence: In the year April 2003 to March 2004, 12.6% (25) of homeless applicants (eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need) were received as a result of domestic abuse (violent breakdown of relationship,

involving partner). In the year April 2004 to March 2005, this figure has fallen slightly to 9.3% (17)<sup>1</sup>

**Education:** September 2004 – August 2005

	<b>Average GCE/VCE A/AS Point Score</b>	<b>Students Achieving 2 or More GCE/VCE A Level or Equivalent Passes</b>	<b>Students Achieving 3 or More A Grades at GCE/VCE A Level</b>
Girls	276.2	94.2%	8.2%
Boys	239.8	85.3%	3.1%

The data shows that girls in Dartford consistently outperform boys in education post 16, which is in line with national trends. However, boys in Dartford have a low point score, 2 or more A level passes and lower A grade achievement than both the south east and England average. The performance of female students is broadly similar to the south and England average in all areas

**2.2 About the Council**

The district of Dartford lies at the heart of the Thames Gateway, an area currently subject to major regeneration and renewal including proposals for future regeneration. This means that not only are we experiencing significant amounts of change in the local area, but that we have an opportunity to create first class services for local people. This is reflected in the Council’s vision;

*To make Dartford “the place of quality and choice, a place where people choose to live, work and enjoy their leisure time”*

In support of this vision, the Council’s Corporate Plan (2006/07) has identified the five priority service area themes; Citizenship and Community, Regeneration, Leisure Time, Environment, Housing, and the corporate values Quality services and Corporate Health.

**2.3 Equality and Diversity at Dartford**

Dartford Council is committed to mainstreaming equality in Council services and in employment and both our Corporate Plan and the Community Strategy make specific reference to how we can make services more effective for all local people.

Dartford’s **Corporate Plan** commits us to;

- Involve Dartford’s communities in the decisions which affect their lives
- Ensure equal access to services

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<sup>1</sup> Dartford Borough Council Domestic Abuse Policy

The Kent Thameside **Community Strategy Towards The Futureplace** commits us to;

- Capitalise on the varied contributions that various sections of the community can bring to the recreational, sporting, and cultural life of the area, including, for example: children and young people, minority ethnic and faith communities, people with disabilities, older people and the lesbian and gay communities.

Dartford Council's **Comprehensive Equality Policy** states that;

- We want to achieve equality of opportunity in all our activities, including the delivery of services to the community, as a direct employer of staff and through the various activities we fund. We will put in place a range of actions to get rid of discrimination and victimisation within the communities we serve and our workforce.

**The Equality Standard for Local Government** aims to encourage the integration of the equality strands of disability, gender, race, sexuality, age, and religion and faith into local government policy, focusing on service delivery and employment and pay. The Council is committed to progressing through the levels of the Equality Standard, and this Scheme has been written to complement and co-ordinate with the equality work we are doing to achieve this, as outlined in our Corporate Equality Action Plan. For more information, please go to [www.dartford.gov.uk/equalities](http://www.dartford.gov.uk/equalities)

## **2.4 Current Progress: Gender Equality at Dartford**

Dartford Council already considers the differing needs of men and women in its functions and policies and has taken steps to promote equality and eliminate discrimination and harassment;

- Equality Impact Assessments have been completed for Housing, Communications, HR, Council Tax, Benefits and Customer Services and the following services are currently completing assessments; Community Safety, Parking Services, Project Delivery, Planning, Planning Policy, Environmental Health, Legal Services. All assessments have taken account of the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender.
- Dartford Borough Council Domestic Abuse Policy (January 2006) sets out the Council's major role in awareness raising and reducing the incidence and acceptability of domestic abuse. The Council provides support and information for those experiencing domestic abuse, taking into account those from diverse communities.
- The Policy and Housing teams are currently working on a strategy to address the needs of homeless young people, in particular looking at the

- provision of mixed hostel accommodation for young girls and issues around personal safety.
- The Council supports community groups such as Dartford and Gravesham Women's Aid and Dartford Ladies Football Club.
  - The recently introduced *Grabacab* scheme has increased night time safety in the town centre for women.
  - The Dartford Town Against Crime initiative has included work with female shop workers in the town centre to ensure their safety and joint working with the police on issues such as drink spiking.

## **3. Delivering Gender Equality**

### **3.1 Collecting and Using Information**

In line with Dartford's Comprehensive Equality Policy and Corporate Equality Action Plan, the Council regularly collects information through various departmental monitoring systems and our Corporate monitoring standard form collects information on gender. The Corporate Monitoring Team meets regularly to investigate ways in which such data can be shared, analysed and improved.

The Council has gathered information on the effect of its policies on men and women through these monitoring systems and through the rigorous impact assessments which have been carried out (see below). This information has informed the priorities and objectives identified in this scheme.

The equality profile, which includes gender, of all those who complain to the Council is also systematically collected and monitored to identify any trends.

The specific steps we will take to gather information on gender equality are set out in the action plan at the end of this scheme.

### **3.2 Assessing Impact**

The impact on gender equality of the Council's existing and new policies and practices is already assessed through the Council's established equality impact assessment process. The results of completed impact assessments which have gender implications have been incorporated into this scheme and action plan. Actions arising from completed impact assessments are incorporated into departmental service plans and therefore progressed as part of the Council's core business. For more information on impact assessment and the Council's system, please see section 4.3 'Impact Assessment' of the Council's Disability Equality Scheme. All completed impact assessments can be accessed at [www.dartford.gov.uk/equality](http://www.dartford.gov.uk/equality)

### **3.3 Consultation**

Dartford Council recognises the importance of engaging key stakeholders in consultation for this Gender Equality Scheme in order to understand the key gender equality issues in Dartford and to inform the priorities identified through impact assessment.

Consultation with employees takes place through the staff consultative group and through *In Touch*, the Council's in house magazine. Service users and the wider community have been consulted on our draft objectives by being invited to comment on the scheme through the website [www.dartford.gov.uk/equality](http://www.dartford.gov.uk/equality).

Dartford Council will continue to use a range of consultative forums to identify gender equality issues. These include user groups such as the Residents' Forum, Youth and Elder Councils, and relevant organisations such as the Kent Equality Reference Group and Dartford Children's Consortium.

### **3.4 Reporting and Reviewing**

The progress of this scheme will be regularly monitored through the Council's performance management system, Covalent, which produces monthly reports of the status of all the Council's targets. This will ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed into the Council's core business and staff are clear about lines of responsibility. As with our other equality plans, the progress of the scheme will also be reported regularly to the Equality Steering Group (Management Team) and Member Champion for Equalities.

The entire scheme will be reviewed on an annual basis and a report on progress produced. Progress will be monitored and assessed corporately by the Policy Team

### **3.5 Procurement and Partnerships**

The gender equality duty applies to all services which are procured by the Council and we will work to ensure that gender equality considerations are built into this process through both the procurement equality standard and staff training.

Dartford Council is also part of a number of partnerships in the local area, such as the Children's Consortium and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, and the Local Strategic Partnership, through which a number of functions are carried out. The Council will ensure that equality statements are included in all partnership documents and that gender equality is promoted in relevant initiatives.

## 4. Employment

The Council currently has robust systems in place to ensure that gender equality in employment is achieved. There are policies in place which cover flexible working, managing leave for parents and carers, managing pregnancy and return from maternity leave, grievance and disciplinary procedures, redundancy and retirement. The recruitment process also includes monitoring by gender at each stage and covers discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment. Support for part-time workers is also provided.

### 4.1 Equal Pay

An Equal Pay Audit completed in December 2006 carried out by South East Employers stated that 'Dartford Borough Council demonstrably operates a well managed, modern pay and reward system free from bias'. The report examined all pay information, focusing on gender based differences in pay for employees undertaking equal work. It found that 'by using the evaluation system thoroughly and rigorously this has ensured that post grades are free from discrimination.'

The gender break down of staff is as follows;

Total staff	Male staff	Female staff
420	149	271
100%	35.5%	64.5%

As of December 2006, 30% of the top 5% earners were women.

### 4.2 Harassment

The Council is committed to eliminating harassment including sexual harassment and eliminating discrimination against, and harassment of, transsexual staff and potential staff. This is demonstrated in the Dignity at Work Policy which sets out guidance for employees on dealing with gender related harassment.

### 4.3 Training

A comprehensive programme of equality training for Council staff took place in February and March 2007 and included specific training on gender equality and how staff can implement this in their day to day work.

An impact assessment of Human Resources Training and Development Policy recommended that monitoring of work based training opportunities be introduced in order to gain a strategic understanding of the equality profile, including gender of employees given training.

## **5. Gender Equality Objectives**

The Council has identified a number of gender equality objectives through information gathered on current performance, completed equality impact assessments and feedback from the consultation process, as demonstrated in this Scheme. The aims and objectives identified support the Council's corporate priorities as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2006/07, and will enable us to meet our duties under the Gender Equality Duty.

### **5.1 Objectives**

- Gain a greater understanding of the issues affecting women and men in Dartford
- Eliminate inequality of access to Council services and information as a result of gender
- Ensure housing provided by the Council is safe and secure
- Continue to promote equality of opportunity in employment
- Ensure Procurement procedures meet the Gender Equality Duty
- Review this Gender Equality Scheme every three years

### **5.2 Action Plan**

The following action plan outlines the steps the Council will take to achieve our objectives over the next three years, 2007-2010

## ACTION PLAN 2007-2010

Objective	Action	Completion Date	Lead Officer(s)
<b>Gain a greater understanding of the issues affecting women and men in Dartford</b>	Gather information on the differing experiences and viewpoints of men and women through analysis of a range of sources including the General User Satisfaction Survey, Tenants Forum and consultations.	December 2007	Policy Officer
	Improve links with local community groups.	March 2008	Policy Officer
	Monitor satisfaction levels of men and women with Council services through the complaints system.	ongoing	Corporate Complaints Officer
	Ensure consultation activities offer sufficient opportunities for residents with caring responsibilities to respond.	ongoing	Communications Manager

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Completion Date</b>	<b>Lead Officer(s)</b>
<b>Eliminate inequality of access to Council services and information as a result of gender</b>	Continue to conduct Gender Equality Impact Assessments of Council functions and services to identify any access issues	All assessments to be completed by March 2008	Policy Officer
	Encourage take up of services by women by encouraging more partnership working in terms of advertising i.e. through working with the Children's Consortium.	March 2009	Policy Officer
<b>Ensure housing provided by the Council is safe and secure</b>	Review the housing options for homeless young women aged 16-18 to ensure the Council is providing safe and secure living environments.	August 2007	Head of Housing, Housing Policy Manager, Housing Options and Advice Manager, Policy Officer
	Review and implement the Domestic Abuse Strategy and provide support for people suffering from domestic violence.	March 2009	Housing Policy Manager and Housing Options and Advice Manager

Objective	Action	Completion Date	Lead Officer(s)
	Ensure a female presence when completing housing repairs where requested	ongoing	Housing Maintenance Manager
<b>Continue to promote equality of opportunity in employment</b>	Monitor job titles as they become vacant to ensure consistency as described in the equal pay audit	ongoing	Human Resources Manager
	Ensure the provision of training does not advantage or disadvantage one employee more than another on the basis of gender by - Monitoring annually the profile of employees offered/given corporate training by gender. - Managers to provide details of departmental/technical training for HR to monitor the profile of employees offered/given departmental/technical training by gender.	ongoing	Human Resources Manager

Objective	Action	Completion Date	Lead Officer(s)
<b>Ensure Procurement procedures meet the Gender Equality Duty</b>	Review and amend the Procurement Equality Standard to include requirements for Gender Equality and ensure that performance conditions are included in contracts	December 2007	Head of Legal Services
<b>Review this Gender Equality Scheme every three years</b>	Produce annual progress reports and publish on the website	ongoing	Policy Officer

## **A: Definition of Discrimination**

In the SDA, unlawful discrimination is defined as:

- direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex
- discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity leave
- discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment
- direct and indirect discrimination against married persons and civil partners
- victimisation
- harassment and sexual harassment.

In the employment field, the SDA prohibits discrimination in non-contractual pay and benefits, such as discretionary bonuses. Sex discrimination related to contractual pay and benefits is dealt with under the EqPA.

The EqPA (read in the light of article 141 of the Treaty of Rome) gives an individual a right to the same contractual pay and benefits as a person of the opposite sex in the same employment, or where the source of the pay is the same, where the man and the woman are doing:

- the same or broadly similar work
- work which has been rated as equivalent under an analytical job evaluation study
- work that is of equal value (work of equal value is where the work done is different but considered to be of equal value or worth in terms of demands such as effort, skill and decision-making).

A public authority can pay a man more than a woman (or vice versa) in such circumstances if there is a genuine and material factor for doing so which is not attributable to direct or indirect sex discrimination.