



Sunderland City Council

Equality Scheme 2012 – 2016

This document can be provided in a number of different formats. If you would like a copy of this in an alternative format, please contact a member of the People and Neighbourhoods Team on 0191 561 1240

Foreword

The council recognises and values highly, the diversity of people within the city and is clear that everyone should be treated as equals, irrespective of their circumstances or background. So, it is with pleasure that we present Sunderland City Council's draft Equality Scheme 2012-16 following consultation with local communities and stakeholders.

The council is committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to ensuring that all of our policies, the development and delivery of services, and our employment practices reflect this.

Through the development and implementation of this Equality Scheme, we will continue to promote equality of opportunity amongst different groups of people and ensure that potentially vulnerable groups and individuals are supported, and their needs are addressed, in ways that are best suited to them. We will also continue to work to foster good relations between different groups and communities in the city.

This scheme outlines how the council will seek to achieve this, and how we will facilitate local people to participate in 'city life'. We want to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be involved in shaping and influencing the decisions and services that affect them and their communities.

Central to the design of the scheme is the city council's belief that by addressing inequalities, and helping to remove the barriers to opportunities that can be faced by many people, strong and resilient communities - and the individuals within them - can flourish.

Cllr Paul Watson
Leader of the Council

Dave Smith
Chief Executive

Contents

1.0 Introduction	4
2.0 Legal Requirement	6
3.0 The diversity of Sunderland’s residents.....	8
4.0 Our Plans and Objectives.....	10
5.0 What we have in place to help us deliver equality	14
6.0 Progress made to date and key achievements	16
7.0 Procurement and Commissioning	25
8.0 Consultation and Engagement	27
9.0 The Council as an Employer	29
10.0 Schools	28
11.0 Monitoring and measuring progress	31
Appendix 1: Engagement Schedule	33
Appendix 2: Summary of Engagement Feedback	33

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. Sunderland City Council is committed to improving opportunities for all the people in the city and welcomes the benefits a diverse population can bring to an area. A rich and vibrant mix of people contributes to building the unique culture that makes Sunderland the place it is. We want to celebrate this diversity and continue to build on the positive work already undertaken in Sunderland. This Equality Scheme reflects and demonstrates a new joined-up approach to equalities for the Council, replacing the Corporate Equality Plan and three separate equality schemes (covering race, disability and gender).
- 1.2. This Scheme sets out what we want to achieve in equalities, building on the Council's previous work, and demonstrates how we are meeting the general and specific equality duties placed on the public sector by the Equality Act 2010. This Scheme provides information on the arrangements we have in place to ensure equalities underpins all that we do to promote equality of opportunity and shows how we meet our equality duties, including arrangements to undertake equality analysis. It sets out what we are doing in relation to the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage and/or civil partnership. The legal context to the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty is contained within Section 2.0: Legal Requirement.
- 1.3. The Scheme explains how we prioritise objectives and where information will be published to allow the public to examine and challenge the Council. Our evidence includes details of intelligence gathered from equality analysis, consultation, engagement and involvement with key stakeholders including residents, Council staff, Elected Members, partner organisations, equality forums and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations. A summary of the feedback from our engagement is included in Appendix 3.

- 1.4. Our approach is framed around recognition that disadvantage and discrimination may take a variety of forms. It can be based on age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marital or civil partnership status or also other factors such as, but not exclusively, people living in poverty, single parent households, people with carer responsibilities, ex-servicemen and women and ex-offenders. The 'protected characteristics' cover a wide range of ways in which an individual could face discrimination and most people will face the potential for discrimination based on these at some point during their lifetime. Our approach recognises the complexity of individuals within the context of their location and the impact combinations of factors can have. When people have more than one of these characteristics they can experience multiple forms of discrimination and inequality.
- 1.5. A welcoming and inclusive city brings a wide range of benefits for everyone. If individuals are able to live their lives to their full potential through work, volunteering and education and learning opportunities as part of a cohesive community, Sunderland will remain a vibrant place where people and businesses will choose to locate. If people choose to live, shop or socialise elsewhere this doesn't just mean the loss of a resident but also a loss of revenue for local businesses, a loss of a potential worker and colleague who can bring unique skills to a team or organisation and lost volunteers. To achieve this requires a delicate balance between providing all of our services and facilities as accessible and welcoming to all as standard, but also ensuring that where specific provision is needed that this is provided in a way which meets needs based on understanding of the issues faced by people with different characteristics.
- 1.6. Whilst a key aspiration is for Sunderland to be welcoming and accessible to all as a matter of course, the complexity of individuals and the context in which they live, means we appreciate the varied

impact different characteristics can have for individuals at different times. To avoid discrimination and improve equality of opportunity does not mean that we will treat everyone the same all of the time. Particular interventions or actions will be most appropriate for some people at specific times and focused actions on particular forms of disadvantage will be most successful in promoting equality for different groups at different times. An approach which seeks to treat everyone the same all of the time and which does not reflect individual needs will not achieve our aspiration for a more equal Sunderland in which people also feel more equal.

- 1.7. The Scheme and particularly the objectives have been developed in light of the challenging financial context. In such times it is vital to ensure that actions are realistic and focus on tackling issues to achieve positive outcomes in an efficient and effective way. The actions accompanying the objectives have been developed to be cost-effective and targeted at the key issues raised through research and consultation. The approach taken throughout the Scheme recognises the increased impact on our communities varying needs in the current climate.

2.0 Legal Requirement

- 2.1. The Equality Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force on the 5th April 2011. This Duty applies to all public authorities.

Public Sector Equality Duty

2.2. The Public Sector Equality Duty brings together previous gender, race and disability duties and extends the protection from discrimination to include nine 'protected characteristics', which are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership status (in respect of the need to eliminate discrimination between the two).

2.3. The Public Sector Equality Duty is designed to ensure achieving equality of opportunity, avoiding discrimination and building good relations are considered when delivering public authorities day to day business. Equality considerations must therefore be reflected in the design of all policies and the delivery of all services. In short, the Council must have due regard of the need to:

- a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (this includes tackling prejudice and promoting understanding)

2.4. The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

This applies to both service prioritisation and employment.

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011

2.5. The specific duties came into force on the 10th September 2011 and require public bodies to be transparent about how they are responding to the Equality Duty; to publish relevant, proportionate information showing compliance with the Duty, and to set equality objectives. The specific duties aim to ensure the public have enough information available to them regarding decision making and the equality data underpinning this, to allow informed public scrutiny. This will focus decision-makers on real consideration of equality issues. The regulations require public authorities to publish:

- Information to demonstrate their compliance with the equality duty
- Schools information and their equality objectives
- Equality objectives, that are specific and measurable

3.0 The diversity of Sunderland's residents

3.1. The Council appreciates the benefits diversity brings to the city and will continue to celebrate this contribution; it also recognises that in order to give people equal access to services, we sometimes need to tailor our response. Equality of opportunity cannot be achieved by

simply providing the same service to everyone in the same way. This means it is incredibly important that we understand the needs of different people and groups. Most people experience inequality at some point in their lives, but some people experience greater inequality than others, including inequality in accessing services. If the Council doesn't understand what inequalities people in the city face and what can be a barrier for someone accessing services, then it cannot adapt the service to offer equal access and eliminate potential inequality. The most effective means of understanding and addressing an individual's needs is by engaging with them. It is also important when the Council is designing policies and services that it considers the general needs of residents and breaks down assumptions about Sunderland and the people who live in it.

3.2. To enhance understanding of the needs of our residents we collate and analyse intelligence relating to the nine protected characteristics as well as other information relating to other pertinent characteristics such as poverty. This helps us to understand who we are providing services to and how changes and decisions relating to those services may impact on our residents. This is at the heart of all decision making and service planning. Equality profiles relating to the protected characteristics accompany this document and they will continue to be developed, through an annual refresh, as further intelligence is gathered. Additional profiles will be developed for non-protected characteristics and for the five geographic areas in the city on an ongoing basis.

3.3. There is existing corporate guidance for gathering equality information; this will be refreshed during 2012.

3.4. The key sources of information that help us to understand the diversity of the people of Sunderland are:

- Data collection

- Research, engagement and resident feedback
- Equality analysis

3.5. The Council recognises that developing understanding through these key sources is essential to shaping the services we provide and shaping the Council's equality objectives.

4.0 Our Plans and Priorities

4.1. Our approach to equality and diversity is informed by our overall aims as a council and as part of the Sunderland Partnership. Our equality objectives have been developed in line with these high-level aspirations, which are summarised below, and also draw on the specific equality needs of the city's residents. To make sure our approach is appropriate and truly reflects our city we have made use of the full range of information available and wish to undertake appropriate engagement. Our understanding draws upon the intelligence already gathered through data and statistical analysis. Objectives based on this analysis are published (see Appendix 1) as part of this scheme and will be updated annually to reflect current data, intelligence and feedback from residents, groups and organisations.

Council Priorities and Objectives

4.2. The Council's overall aims are set out in the Corporate Outcomes Framework. The framework provides a set of strategic priorities and key outcomes for the Council as a whole. The priorities are grouped under three broad headings of People, Place and Economy:

- **People:** Raising aspirations, creating confidence and promoting opportunity

- **Place:** Leading the investment in an attractive and inclusive city and its communities
- **Economy:** Creating an entrepreneurial University City at the heart of a Low Carbon regional economy

The following city level outcomes, drawn from a wider set that relate to People, Place or Economy, are particularly relevant to equalities:

- A prosperous and equitable city
- A city where every resident is healthy and enjoys a high standards of wellbeing
- A city that cares for its most vulnerable
- A city which is, and feels, safe and secure
- A city where opportunities meet people's aspirations
- A vibrant, attractive city with a strong cultural identity
- An inclusive city economy for all ages

4.3. These priorities are reflected in the Council's Service Business Plans which define the actions we will take to achieve these outcomes. Actions are identified for the next three years to deliver continued improvement in service delivery and use of resources. The targets and outcomes take account of the actions contained in key plans and strategies and link to the Council's Corporate Plan, the key overarching document for the Council. The information coming through Service Business Plans is analysed centrally to identify any combined impacts of changes to service provision.

Sunderland Partnership Objectives

4.4. The Sunderland Strategy 2008-2025 sets out further aims for the Sunderland Partnership to achieve on behalf of the city. These aims are currently being refreshed to create a Sunderland Outcomes Framework. The aims of the Sunderland Outcomes Framework will

complement the Council's Corporate Outcomes Framework and the Council's Equality Scheme.

- 4.5. A working group looking at 'Creating Inclusive Communities' focuses on issues relating to equality and cohesion across the Sunderland Partnership. The Partnership is one of the groups that has been engaged in the development of this scheme and associated Equalities Objectives.

Council Equality Objectives

- 4.6. The Council's equality objectives have been developed based on an understanding of the needs of different communities in Sunderland and the Council's Corporate Outcomes Framework these reflect both our aspirations for Sunderland in relation to equality and our legal duties. They have been informed through a combination of existing intelligence, analysis of services and decisions for their impact on equality, and responding to requirements of equality law. Views from residents, Council staff, Elected Members, Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and other partners are vital in further developing these. Each year we will take a fresh look at all of the information we have available to us and update the objectives where appropriate.

- 4.7. The Council's high level objectives are expressed in terms of People, Place and Economy. **Our aim for people is to:**
- raise aspirations,
 - create confidence and
 - promote opportunity.

Objectives for the organisation and workforce:

1. Share innovation, best practice and understanding to enhance partnership working in relation to equalities.

2. Ensure the Council as an employer has a robust understanding of its diverse workforce and through this promotes understanding and demonstrates compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duties.
3. Ensure all Council employees understand their responsibilities for equality and behave in a way that promotes equality when providing services and working with colleagues and partners.

Objectives for people:

4. Support people to overcome individual barriers and manage their own health and wellbeing, and the health and wellbeing of others.
5. Support people to overcome barriers to educational opportunities, gaining employment and career progression.
6. Support people with advice, support and in some cases protection, so they feel safer and more secure.

Objectives relating to how and where people live and work:

7. Ensure people have a place to live that meets the needs and entitlements of their household.
8. Supporting each neighbourhood to create a strong and inclusive sense of community.
9. Support efforts to grow and attract new industries, jobs opportunities to provide wider opportunities to suit a diverse population

Objectives relating to promoting understanding and challenging unacceptable behaviour:

10. Promote understanding and celebrate the cultures that make Sunderland special.
11. Challenge unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and make it clear they are unacceptable.

5.0 What we have in place to help us deliver equality

- 5.1. We have a robust structure and sound processes to actively promote equality of opportunity for all. The structure is made up of the following:
- The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council have portfolio responsibility for equality and diversity
 - Council Cabinet takes collective responsibility for decisions impacting on equalities
 - The Executive Management Team has operational responsibility for ensuring that equality objectives are met.
 - The Corporate Communities Group drives equality issues across the Council; the group is chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive and reports directly to the Council's Executive Management Team
 - The Strategy, Policy and Performance Management function provides strategic support to council services with regard to equality issues
 - The Council is represented on the Sunderland Partnership's Inclusive Communities Group; this group influences equality and diversity issues across the key partnership documents and work streams

- The Council is represented on the Regional Equalities Network, this helps the Council ensure it is up to date with, and influencing, regional as well as local issues
 - Use of the Equality Framework for Local Government, a tool that has been developed for local government to support councils to address their legal obligations under anti-discrimination law and to promote best practice in equality and diversity
 - A refreshed and user-friendly approach to equality analysis including guidance to inform the process and a recording tool to summarise and set out the key findings from the analysis
 - Area Voluntary and Community Sector Networks supported by the Council's Community Services and engaged with the Council's Area Committees
 - Community Cohesion Networks are facilitated by the Sunderland Partnership
 - Equality Forums and associated networks supported by the Sunderland Partnership, these feed into the Sunderland Partnership's Inclusive Communities Group
 - Employee Representative Groups for all equalities protected characteristics; these are currently being refreshed.
 - Equalities is included in the Equality Codes of Practice through the Sunderland Compact
- 5.2. In addition to the structures mentioned above, council employees are essential in delivering services in a way that promotes equality. To ensure this happens, there are two teams that provide a key role in improving and facilitating this area of work. The People and Neighbourhoods Team have responsibility for designing policy and strategy related to Communities and Equalities, this involves supporting staff within the organisation to understand their responsibilities and consider the needs of different groups of people within their work. The Partnership Team works with residents and partners to encourage community understanding and

support residents to raise issues that are important to them with the council and other partner organisations. This work takes place through Equality Forums and associated networks as well as the Community Cohesion Networks.

6.0 Progress made to date and key achievements

- 6.1. The Council has made considerable progress in the way it addresses equality issues, outlined below. Section 11 outlines how progress will continue to be measured, reported and published.

Equality Framework for Local Government

- 6.2. In 2008 the Council was assessed as level 3 (of a possible 5) against the Equality Standard for Local Government. When the Equality Standard became the Equality Framework, Level 3 was translated to 'Achieving'. The Framework now has three achievement levels of 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent'. The Council is now working towards a declaration of 'Excellent' status.

Equality Forums

- 6.3. The Council employs staff that work within the Sunderland Partnership Team to support residents to influence their city. Part of this involves supporting and linking with a number of equality forums that allow participation of residents or partners interested in issues affecting the nine protected characteristics. The equality forums take different forms based on the needs of the people they represent, for example, face to face groups or internet groups. The groups and their inter-linkages are outlined in the table below.

Group Name	Membership	Links to other groups	Protected Characteristic
The Disability Independent Advisory Group (DIAG)	Residents Representatives of organisations who work with disabled people	Physical Disability and Sensory Needs Group (a sub-group of the DIAG)	Disability
BME Practitioners Forum	Partners (VCS organisations, Public bodies) Representatives of organisations who work with disabled people	BME independent Forum BME Network	Race
BME Independent Forum (currently being re-developed)	Residents	BME Practitioner's Forum BME Network	Race
LGBT Practitioners Forum	Partners (VCS organisations, Public bodies) Representatives of organisations who work with BME people	LBGT Electronic Network	Sexual Orientation Gender Reassignment Marriage and Civil Partnership

LGBT electronic network	Residents	LGBT Practitioners Forum	Sexual Orientation Gender Reassignment Marriage and Civil Partnership
Sunderland Interfaith Forum	Residents Representatives of organisations who work with people of faith		Faith or belief
Gender Agenda	Residents Representatives of organisations who's work relates to gender	Domestic Violence Partnership Group	Gender Pregnancy and Maternity
Older Person's Advisory Group (Run by Age UK)	Residents	Five are based over 50s forums Partnership Team	Age
Young People's Equality Forum	Residents	Youth Parliament Cohesion Networks (Youth Worker and Schools) Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum	Age

6.4. The equality forums are encouraged to set their own agendas and raise key issues of interest or concern with the Sunderland Partnership, the Council or any other partner organisation. The

Council also invites the equality forums to contribute to key consultations but, as independent groups, they set their own agenda.

- 6.5. To ensure the equality forums have a voice in the decision making processes of the city the Inclusive Communities Partnership Group includes representatives of both the equality forums and partner organisations. The council's People and Neighbourhoods Team are represented at the Inclusive Communities Group to ensure strong links between community issues and policy development. Issues raised at the Inclusive Communities group can also be reported into the Sunderland Innovation and Improvement Group, a key group of the Sunderland Partnership.
- 6.6. Equality forums have been directly involved in developing the Sunderland Compact (an agreement between the organisations of the Sunderland Partnership and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations) to improve their relationship for mutual advantage and community gain. Each equality forum has the opportunity to develop its own specific code of practice to be appended to the main Sunderland Compact. It is anticipated that all the equality forums will eventually do this; however it is recognised that the forums need to develop at their own pace.
- 6.7. The Partnership Team also supports an annual Partnership Conference, which aims to supports Equality Forums in coming together to network and share experiences. This also provides opportunity to discuss and contribute to work on key themes such as financial inclusion, engagement and community safety.

Sunderland ARCH

- 6.8. ARCH is a network of organisations working together across the city to help support victims of hate incidents and, where possible, take action against the suspect. ARCH currently allows reporting of racist,

religious, homophobic, transphobic or disability hate incidents. In addition to victim support, through the data collected on the ARCH system, intelligence can be used to direct resources in an area where more incidents are occurring. Area data is also discussed at the Community Cohesion Networks so that better understanding of issues can be sought and solutions or preventative work generated. ARCH is currently being rolled out into schools to enable more co-ordination with anti-bullying.

Cohesion Networks

6.9. As part of efforts to promote good relations between people with different characteristics and contribute to building cohesive communities the Sunderland Partnership supports Cohesion Networks in the five areas of the city. These groups work at an operational level and include a wide variety of organisation and projects which work directly with the public in the area. These groups build on the positive work already going in areas but also look to see where additional value can be added and respond to particular threats to cohesion from a partnership perspective.

Intelligence

6.10. The Sunderland Partnership Team log issues arising from both the Cohesion Networks and the Equality Forums to ensure there is a record of community concerns. This takes on board community issue-based intelligence recorded as part of other local area work such as VCS Networks and Local Multi Agency Problem Solving groups and allows identification of common themes and issues to be addressed. This data can be split by geographical area, theme or group (protected characteristic). The issues are reported to, and monitored by, the Inclusive Communities Partnership Group and the Sunderland Improvement and Innovation Group. This log will also feed into the

Council's Intelligence Hub and will help to strengthen the ongoing refresh of the Equality Profiles.

Equality Analysis

- 6.11. In reaching our decisions, designing policies and strategies and reviewing service provision it is crucial that we take into consideration the people of Sunderland and their varied requirements so we can provide the most appropriate and effective service. This is also required in order to meet our legal requirements. If we are to achieve this we will need to know who uses a service or who isn't using it and what the catchment of a service is or should be. We need to understand how an individual's needs may differ according to their characteristics.
- 6.12. To help the Council gain understanding of the impact on people with protected characteristics it carries out equality analysis in relation to policies, services and key decisions. This information is made available to decision makers to inform their decisions. The Equality Analysis Tool consists of a guidance document to provide context and stimulate discussions to underpin analysis of how a proposal, policy or decision could impact on individuals with protected characteristics. This is accompanied by a simple recording tool on which information relating to impacts and actions is noted. The guidance is used in discussions where the potential impacts are identified and noted and actions are devised to address potential negative impacts. Together these form the Equality Analysis.
- 6.13. This revised approach to Equality Analysis emphasises analysis of the needs and requirements of individuals, and understanding the impact a service or decision may have. This ensures the Council gains real understanding and insight into the impacts of its services and decisions on protected characteristics and other key groups which face disadvantage. It has been developed in line with the new

guidance and legal requirements included in the 2010 Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty.

6.14. Our approach to assessments supports the consideration of information from a range of sources and can include:

- Results of engagement with protected groups and others
- Professional knowledge
- Population data
- Service user feedback
- Consultation responses
- Research intelligence
- Existing (protected characteristic, area and themed) needs assessments.

6.15. As the Council recognises the broad nature of potential discrimination and disadvantage, in addition to the 9 protected characteristics as defined by the law, our Equality Analysis approach includes specific space for the consideration of other groups who face potential additional challenges. The main focus of the analysis will vary depending on the particular area of focus for the decision as the particular characteristics impacted upon by a proposal will vary according to the nature of the proposal; however we are particularly aware of the significant impact and cross-cutting nature of economic deprivation and poverty for the city. Analysis of these issues will be considered alongside the other statutory characteristics.

6.16. This process is written into the Business Service Planning cycle so that all services must consider equalities as part of their annual planning. It is also integral to decision making through the Cabinet reporting procedure and the delegated decision processes.

6.17. Summaries of equality analysis are published on the council website to allow the public to understand how decisions have been made. The

information coming from equality analysis is then centrally collated to ensure we have due regard to equality needs across all the functions when a number of decisions are made together, for example, when budget setting.

Equalities and Finance

6.18. Our approach to financial planning includes clear recognition of the importance of equality which is integrated through the process. Given the current challenging financial context, Equality Analysis becomes even more essential to taking effective financial decisions which meet the needs of the diverse people of Sunderland and address our legal obligations. Our approach recognises that this must be undertaken throughout the process with use of Equality Analysis to consider proposals at different stages of their development to be truly effective. Analysis therefore is undertaken throughout the development and implementation of proposals.

6.19. The Equality Analysis approach has been particularly relevant for the Council's annual budget-setting process. The need to achieve additional savings in response to reduced resources will undoubtedly result in changes to the way many services are delivered in the future. As part of the budget decision making process it is therefore crucial that equalities analysis is integrated into the budget-setting process to inform decision-making, meet legal requirements and reflect the needs of residents and service users. This is achieved through the following approach.

6.20. Each directorate within the Council undertakes Equality Analysis of their proposals using the Council's Equality Analysis approach which is outlined earlier in this section. The approach enables its directorates to consider the impact of the proposals in relation to the nine protected

characteristics and any other groups which face disadvantage or discrimination such as carers or those living in poverty.

6.21. This analysis is summarised and shared with decision-makers as part of the preliminary financial planning process with full analysis, or service review as appropriate, provided to inform later stages of the decision-making process. This analysis reflects the information available on the proposals and the analysis will continue to be updated to reflect additional information as proposals are developed further and monitored during implementation to make sure potential disadvantage and discrimination is considered throughout the process.

6.22. This approach ensures that information is used to analyse the potential impact of proposals at an early stage of the process. It also enables later refinement and additions to the analysis to provide a fuller understanding of the impact as the proposal is developed and further information becomes available.

Equality and Customer Service

6.23. The Council has an ambitious strategy for customer service which seeks to put the customer at the heart of our delivery systems. It approaches accessibility, responsiveness and quality of all services from the customer's viewpoint of:

- Help me quickly, courteously and professionally
- Get it right first time
- Give me what I need (not necessarily what I want)
- Include me, and give me choice

6.24. This approach to customer service has significant overlap with our approach to equality. Both rest on an understanding of the people who use, or could use, a service to make sure they are delivered from the perspective of the customer or service-user.

- 6.25. The Council has a number of mechanisms in place to ensure accessibility of services. Translation and interpretation services are provided via the Council's Language Point Service, all of the Customer Service Centres have been designed in accordance with disability standards and guidelines and have hearing loops as standard. The latest Customer Service Centre development at Fawcett Street includes an Adult Changing Place, height adjustable desks and accessible PCs. Telephone services are provided via Minicom and BT Tynetalk and SMS is used to facilitate easier access for hard of hearing customers. Our web-site meets accessibility standards and has 'Read Me' facility which converts text to speech.
- 6.26. Customer feedback provides a useful way in which we can learn about the issues facing people in Sunderland accessing our services and can highlight where work can be done to achieve better outcomes for all. The new Complaints and Customer Feedback Service monitor trends in customer views gained from feedback, including equality issues, and are working with service areas to ensure this continuous learning is embedded within service delivery arrangements.
- 6.27. In addition to the ARCH arrangements for reporting hate incidents customer concerns on equality issues, or concerns that have an equality aspect to them, can be signposted through the Complaints and Feedback service.
- 6.28. The revised Customer Service and Access Strategies contain a number of actions to ensure accessibility for all as not to exclude or unfairly disadvantage anyone accessing Council services.

7.0 Procurement and Commissioning

- 7.1. As the council looks to commission more of its services it becomes even more vital that the processes we use promote equality. The

council recognises that it has a lot of influence on private business through its spending power and therefore must ensure the organisations it is dealing with are aware of their requirements in relation to equality. The law states that the authority retains responsibility for meeting the equality duty, even if a function is carried out by an external supplier.

- 7.2. Equality and diversity are reflected throughout the Council's Procurement Framework and, through the equality analysis process, across service design and review before undertaking procurement. When a service or directorate is considering changing the way it delivers a service, or looking at what services it provides, it is crucial to undertake an equality analysis of the options to ensure due regard is given to meet the equality duty. In essence that is, to eliminate unlawful discrimination, foster good relations and promote equality of opportunity in relation to the nine protected characteristics. This approach also enables the Council to best consider and meet the needs of all residents. Once it has been decided to procure a service externally, an equality risk assessment matrix is completed to determine if it is high or low risk in relation to equality and diversity. If the procurement is considered low risk then standard harmonised documents are used. However, if it is identified as being high risk additional questions on equality and diversity are asked in order to ensure that fuller information is gathered and used in the Pre-Qualification stage of procurement.
- 7.3. The Invitation to Tender for the successful firms includes basic questions as a minimum within the specification. However, there is scope to add further questions as appropriate to reflect the particulars of the tender and ensure any key concerns are addressed and particular needs met. At the evaluation stage of the tender process, equality and diversity is given due regard.

- 7.4. Once a contract is awarded, the specification for the contract forms part of the contract monitoring process. This process ensures that a contractor is meeting their obligations as set out in the specification for the tender and meeting the key deliverables for the tender. The equality and diversity requirements of the Council are set out in the specification and the method statement which ensures this is part of the monitoring considerations.
- 7.5. The Council will be revising and refreshing its approach to procurement in 2012 during which the procurement framework will be updated. Further work will take place to ensure that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty are fully accounted for in contract monitoring of commissioned services. Equality and diversity will continue to be an integral part of the process to ensure that obligations are met.

8.0 Consultation and Engagement

- 8.1. The Council recognises the importance of involving people in shaping and influencing decisions, so that policies and services truly reflect the needs and aspirations of the people of Sunderland. Part of this is ensuring equality is incorporated into our engagement and consultation processes, helping to ensure service delivery is based on local needs.
- 8.2. As a Council we appreciate that consultation and engagement must reflect the diversity of the city's residents. Sometimes this requires the Council to take different approaches to engagement in order to ensure that all sections of the community have the opportunity to be involved. The Council collects monitoring information on equalities when consulting so we can understand whether people with protected characteristics have different experiences or requirements. Whenever surveys or research is conducted in future we will consider whether it

is appropriate to collect demographic information of the results by protected characteristic. Further information on deciding which monitoring questions to ask is provided through the Equality Data Collection and Monitoring Guidance, which will be refreshed during 2012/13.

8.3. The Council's Consultation Toolkit sets out the agreed approach to consultation and helps officers, plan, design and implement effective consultation. This toolkit explains the importance of thinking about who might be affected or interested in a decision including non-service users and that this should guide consultation. Equality and diversity is central to this and the toolkit emphasises the need for representative and/or inclusive engagement. It also sets out equality and diversity underpinning an understanding and appreciation of different requirements and preferences and this should be incorporated into individualised and appropriate approaches to ensure that engagement and consultation is comprehensive and inclusive. The Compact's Involvement and Consultation Code of Practice also ensures that Equality and Diversity issues are taken into consideration when working with Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

8.4. When preparing new policies or strategies, taking decisions or reviewing service delivery we will involve a variety of partners and engage stakeholders, including Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and groups such as the Equality Forums, Community Spirit (Citizen Panel) and staff equality groups as appropriate. These groups cover a range of protected characteristics. Consultation and engagement has contributed to developing this scheme in a way that intends to meet the needs of all people in Sunderland. During consultation a number of groups will be engaged, including:

- The Sunderland Partnership Inclusive Community Group and associated Equality Forums

- Elected Members via Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee
- The Council's Corporate Communities Group and Employee Groups
- Sunderland's Voluntary and Community Sector organisations via Area VCS Network and Sunderland Compact mechanisms
- Trade Unions via the Joint Consultative Forum

Continuous feedback and analysis will feed into equality objectives on an annual basis.

9.0 The Council as an Employer

Employment

9.1. We have a range of policies and guidance to embed accessibility and fairness into employment and throughout recruitment processes. In particular, the Recruitment and Selection Code of Practice provides generic guidance for those with responsibility for undertaking recruitment and includes information on how to ensure that the process is fully accessible and non-discriminatory by outlining key areas for consideration and some thoughts to consider. This Code of Practice was revised in June 2011 to reflect changes to legislation and is supplemented by a Guidance Note for Managers involved in Recruitment and Selection which provides additional information in relation to health questions. Information regarding equality and diversity is gathered through the recruitment process and is considered alongside employee equality data on an annual basis.¹

9.2. Further policies and procedures, such as the Whistleblowing Procedure, the Harassment at Work Policy and the Grievance Procedure ensure employees are supported to raise concerns

¹ The Council's Human Resources and Organisational Development service has produced a Workforce Diversity Report that is published alongside this scheme

regarding conduct and relationships in the workplace. This includes concerns regarding harassment, victimisation or discrimination.

Staff Development

9.3. Equality and diversity is covered in the Council's e-learning programme. This training is mandatory for all staff and provides them with information on equality and diversity including definition and practical examples. In addition we ensure that relevant topical equality and diversity issues are also covered within each individual training programme.

Council Employee Groups

9.4. We have a number of employee groups that reflect the equality strands. We call on these to help us with the development of policies and strategies and in carrying out equality analysis. There are currently six such groups: age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

10.0 Schools

10.1. Schools play an important role in building a diverse and inclusive community and also have a key role in meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Duty places a specific obligation on schools to publish their equality information and objectives by the 6th April 2012. The Council, through Governor Support, is assisting schools to meet their obligations under the new duty. This support is primarily being done through the Governors Agenda Report Book, which contains information on educational issues that Governors should be aware of and/or need to take action on. The Agenda Report Book is considered the most effective method of communicating with all school governors in the city.

- 10.2. Further support will be provided to schools through the development of standard templates and associated guidance.

11.0 Monitoring and measuring progress

- 11.1. Equality objectives will be monitored on a quarterly basis through the Corporate Communities Group and Sunderland Partnership's Inclusive Communities Group. On an annual basis the equality objectives will be refreshed and reported to the Council's Executive Management Team through the Corporate Communities Group and into the Inclusive Communities Group. Progress will be reported on the website for public scrutiny. Any substantial change to the equality objectives will be referred to the Leader and Deputy Leader as Cabinet members with portfolio holder responsibilities for equalities. The equalities agenda is also accountable to the Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee. The refresh will be informed by an analysis of the information coming through annual Service Business Planning and budget setting Equality Analyses, along with information from consultation, engagement and resident feedback to compile issues and recommendations.

Arrangements for reviewing the scheme

- 11.2. Initially this scheme will be reviewed after 6 months to make sure that it is meeting the needs of the people of Sunderland and providing a useful and user-friendly summary of our approach and objectives. This will make sure that there is adequate time for further input once the scheme has been published for those who have additional comments which were not fed into the initial engagement period. Following this initial refresh, the scheme will be reviewed and amended at least every four years or following any relevant changes in the law and Government guidance. It will also be reviewed following any significant

changes to council structures to ensure that necessary structures for implementation, monitoring and review are in place and reflected in the scheme.

11.3. At each review of the scheme staff of the council, members of the public and partner organisations will be consulted to ensure that the scheme continues to meet their needs and expectations. These consultations will take place in accordance with our consultation strategy and the principles of the Sunderland Compact.

How we will measure and report our progress

11.4. The objectives will have targets which are measurable and have clear timescales and responsibilities attached. These will be monitored on a quarterly basis and reviewed each year by the Corporate Communities Group, through which route staff of the council will be involved in the monitoring of progress. Progress against objectives will be reported to the Inclusive Communities Partnership Group and through that route the public will be involved in the ongoing monitoring of the scheme.

11.5. Where appropriate more in-depth investigations will be undertaken looking at specific areas of interest. These will focus on providing a fuller understanding of what challenges there are, and how we are performing in delivering services to individuals who face discrimination or disadvantage in order to meet our aspiration to improve equality of opportunity.

11.6. Communities, staff and partners will be engaged in the ongoing development of objectives and will be encouraged to challenge the council's practices through the routes described above.

Appendix 1: Engagement Schedule

Group or consultation method	Date
Publication of the draft via the on-line consultation database	23 rd January – 16 th February 2012
Information to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) and feedback sought via: - Area VCS Networks - VCS organisations who are Sunderland Compact signatories	23 rd January – 16 th February 2012
Sunderland Partnership via: - Inclusive Communities Group - Sunderland Innovation and Improvement Group	25 th January 2012 8 th February 2012
Equality Forums	Electronic information shared
Sunderland Compact signatories	Electronic information shared
Engagement event for all interested stakeholders	1st February 2012
Joint Consultative Forum	25 th January 2012
Employee Groups (age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation)	23 rd January – 16 th February 2012
Corporate Communities Group	Electronic comments
Sustainable Communities Scrutiny Committee	Engaged during February engagement period.
Council Cabinet consideration and approval	14 th March 2012
Publication	6 th April 2012

Appendix 2: Summary of Engagement Feedback

As part of the process of preparing this Scheme the Council undertook a period of engagement during which a range of partners and interested groups took part. This process provided considerable depth of information on the key equality issues for people in Sunderland and suggestions for how to improve the Scheme, the profiles and expand on the objectives. Where possible these have been incorporated into this version of the Equality Scheme; however some of the comments will influence the action plan that will progress the objectives and some comments will influence the development of the profiles. The profiles will be going through an additional development process over the next twelve months to expand and refine them to provide greater detail on the day-to-day experiences of people in Sunderland.

Key equality issues for Sunderland raised during engagement

The engagement highlighted a number of significant themes which have been expanded on in this version of the Scheme. These included the importance of promoting an inclusive, accessible and welcoming city as standard within Sunderland and the opportunity to use this to promote the city more widely. Efforts to tackle misconceptions and promote a generally positive environment were also highlighted as a key area for further development. This in particular was felt to be vital during a challenging economic period which has brought significant and fast changes. There was broad definition of equality bringing together the impact of both complex individual needs, and the location a person lives and works in. The session also highlighted the importance of responding to those needs which are not visible and the implications of disclosure on accessing services and feelings of safety and inclusion.

General Comments on the document and engagement process

The response to the document was generally positive and it was felt that it covered the majority of the information in a comprehensive and comprehensible way; although a number of respondents felt a shorter and

less 'heavy' document would be helpful, we have therefore published a short, simplified summary document alongside the main report focusing on the challenges and actions for the future. A number of responses highlighted practical steps which could support the development of the objectives and supporting action plan.

The equality profiles received a significant proportion of the responses and highlighted a number of areas for further development to better reflect the day-to-day experiences of people in Sunderland including case studies. As the profiles are fundamental to underpinning all of the information required for equalities to be fully incorporated they will be fully revised through a process of work with the Equality Forums over the next year.

