

## **Cabinet – 21 March 2007**

### **Age Equality Scheme**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Garry Perry, Safer Stronger Communities

**Service:** Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes

**Wards:** All

**Key decisions:** No

**Forward plan:** No

#### **Summary of report**

The council as employer has a duty to abide by the new age discrimination legislation that came to force on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2006 protecting future potential, and existing, employees from being discriminated against on the basis of age. It is also expected that in the government's effort to modernise and improve public services, age equality requirements will be extended into service delivery and community engagement. Central government will be establishing the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights in October 2007 to safeguard these legislative developments.

The council's Age Equality Scheme (AES) 2007-10 has been developed as part of the Equality and Diversity Strategy. Its aim is to provide the focus for implementation of the government's equalities agenda covering aspects of age. In this AES we have attempted to focus not only on employment, but equally on service provision, community engagement and cohesion in order to meet the new human rights requirements. We have undertaken a three month consultation exercises on the AES with internal and external groups to finalise the scheme and action plan.

#### **Recommendation**

That the draft Age Equality Scheme be agreed.

#### **Resource and legal considerations**

Employment Equality Regulations (Age) 2006 brought a comprehensive set of laws aimed at preventing age discrimination in the work place. It enabled people over-65 to continue working for the council or people of any age to join our pension scheme. The use of medical checks, long term service awards and retirement awards will need to be reviewed. Human Resources and Development (HRD) is currently amending the Council's policies to meet these new requirements. This work began as part of the initial consultations.

As part of implementing the AES, HRD are further improving recruitment practices in order to prevent any potential age discrimination of older or younger people during the application process – for example through job descriptions, employee specifications or the interview process. In addition, the composition of the Council's workforce will be closely monitored to review the representation of different age groups.

### **Citizen impact**

The AES will have a positive impact on customers, potential service users, employees and citizens. The AES action plan includes actions in the area of employment, service delivery, community engagement and cohesion. In the area of employment, the aim is to inform the general public of the new Employment Regulations (Age Equality) and communicate particularly the benefits it will bring to potential job applicants as well as the existing workforce. This is an area in particular that customer feedback informs us the community are interested in knowing more about.

In terms of service delivery, Equality Boards will be looking at whether different age groups are accessing and benefiting from services and in cases of under-representation, for example of the younger or older people, Equality Boards will encourage services to improve their current service promotion and methods of delivery. In relation to community engagement, the council may need to review some of its engagement policies and tools to ensure they do not discriminate or exclude based on age.

### **Community safety**

Through the actions in the AES and improved and targeted services to particular groups along with the increasing focus on community cohesion initiatives, it is hoped that these will over time have a positive impact on community safety.

### **Environmental impact**

There is no direct environmental impact.

### **Performance and risk management issues**

Mainstreaming age into the equalities agenda has its role to play in all the main aspects of the Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) and Joint Area Review inspections including providing a strategic approach, meaningful engagement and the provision of a range of services. Age as an issue and as a monitoring category has also been included in the revised Best Value Performance Indicator 2a - Equality Standard for Local Government.

The changing age profile of Walsall's population will affect the services delivered by the Council. We are expected to promote and support the independence and well-being of older people and to review future demands for care services. In addition, Councils will be assessed on whether they provide a range of methods and mechanisms to consult widely with people of all ages. As part of its community cohesion agenda councils and

their partners are expected to support inter-generational working, such as projects that bring older people and younger people together to share skills and experience. We have some good examples in Walsall through our arts initiatives and education activities.

## **Equality implications**

An important underpinning value of LNPs is the commitment to engage all sections of the community and to ensure that all contributions are valued. A separate workshop on community cohesion will create a better understanding of the role LNPs can play in improving and sustaining community cohesion in their neighbourhood.

The AES is important in that it is fully inclusive of all members of society and therefore can engage with everyone unlike some of the other equality schemes which focus on particular historically disadvantaged groups in society.

## **Consultation**

To support the development of the AES, the Equality and Diversity Team consulted with School Council representatives attending Student Voice Day on 13 October 2006. This consultation revealed that drugs and bullying, domestic violence and racism were amongst the local issues that concerned young people most. It also revealed that the level of knowledge of the council's activities amongst young people is quite low, with the majority of the respondents identifying the council with recycling, rubbish and council tax collection. Very few respondents knew about other council functions for example looked after children, older people or removing abandoned cars.

The findings also revealed young people's perception of the council as an employer. Only 27% of the respondents would consider working for the council. The reasons for not wanting to work for the council were '*low salaries*', '*don't like politics*', negative stereotypes of the council for example '*don't want to be blamed for things*' or simply not realising that some jobs, for example teacher, educational psychologist, fitness instructor are offered by the council.

The Equality and Diversity Team also ran an online consultation entitled '*Age Equality Survey - Your Views on Ageism*' between November and December 2006. 41 people took part in the survey which focused on age as a factor in the delivery of services. The majority of respondents did not think their age affected the way services were delivered, only 9% thought that age did affect the way services were delivered and these were all from 35-44 age group. Correspondingly, the majority of respondents thought that the council involved the residents of their age group when making decisions and presented the information in a way that was easily understood. Only 9% disagreed with these statements and they were all from the 35-44 age group.

Some respondents also said that '*age affecting the way that people are treated may not necessarily be a bad thing*' and that particularly '*older people have life experience and a track record which shows reliability and can be just as adaptable as young people*'.

Both the school councils' and online survey results confirmed that in future we need to particularly focus on finding innovative ways of engaging with younger people and those aged over 65. The findings will contribute to the council's new consultation software being developed by the Transformation Team. This will be cascaded to Equality Boards to inform the Equality Impact Assessments and individual improvement plans.

The AES has also been subject to a wide internal consultation particularly with HRD and council services through directorates' Equality Boards. The HRD are leading on many employment-specific actions in the AES action plan, for example they are including age as a in the Annual Employment Monitoring Report, are undertaking annual monitoring of the category training and development undertaken by staff and are planning to carry out an equality impact assessment of the sickness policy as part of their review of HRD policies. Directorate Equality Boards will implement the AES actions through their Equality Action Plans and annual work on Equality Impact Assessments.

### **Vision 2008**

The AES will support the council's vision to become a '4 star', excellent authority by 2008 as it is linked to several strategic priorities including 'making Walsall a healthy and caring place, making it easier to access local services and listening to what local people want'. Implementation of the AES means tackling harassment and discrimination based on age, improving access to services where there are currently age gaps and creating better engagement mechanisms for under-represented age groups such as younger or older people.

### **Background papers**

The Age Equality Scheme and the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy are both available in full on the web under the 'Council and Democracy'.

### **Author**

Irena Hergottova  
Equality & Diversity Officer  
☎ 653304  
✉ [hergottovai@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:hergottovai@walsall.gov.uk)



**Jamie Morris**  
**Executive Director**

12 March 2007



**Councillor G. Perry**  
**Portfolio Holder**

12 March 2007

# Walsall Council Age Equality Scheme 2007-10

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## ***Introduction***

The Age Equality Scheme (AES) is an additional document in the series of schemes underpinning the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy. The Race Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme have already been published and the Gender Equality Scheme is due to be published in April 2007. As in all the other equality schemes, the aim is to provide focus for the Council's ongoing commitment to equality and implementation of the government's widening equalities agenda covering aspects of age.

The Council, as an employer has a duty to abide by the new age discrimination legislation which came into force on 1 October 2006 protecting future potential, and existing, employees from being discriminated against on the basis of age. It is also expected that in the government's effort to modernise and improve public services, age equality requirements will be extended into service delivery and community engagement. Central Government will be establishing the new Commission for Equality and Human Rights in October 2007 to monitor these recent legislative developments.

In this AES we intend to encompass all the existing and anticipated duties to focus not only on employment, but equally on service provision, community engagement and community cohesion.

Our aim is to become an excellent authority by 2008. In our effort to embed the council's values we have pledged to respect our staff and citizens of Walsall, act with integrity, value equality and diversity, listen to what people say, do what we say, and strive for and deliver excellence. In the Council's vision we have already promised to our citizens, amongst other things, that we will ensure all people are safe and secure, make Walsall a healthy and caring place and make it easier to access local services. We promised that in development of our services and management of our resources we will listen to what local people want. Fulfilling these pledges will not only help us to achieve excellence but set the framework within which we aim to deliver our age equality objectives in the areas of

- Employment
- Service Delivery
- Community Engagement & Cohesion
- Community Cohesion.

Councillor Tom Ansell  
Leader of the Council

Councillor Garry Perry  
Cabinet lead on Communities  
& Partnerships

Dave Martin  
Acting Chief  
Executive

## Further Information and Contacts

If you wish to know more about the Age Equality Legislation and good practice, please contact

Acas - Brandon House  
180 Borough High Street  
London SE1 1LW  
Telephone 0272103613  
[www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

Department for Work and Pensions  
Age Positive  
[www.agepositive.gov.uk](http://www.agepositive.gov.uk)

The Employers Forum on Age  
[www.efa.org.uk](http://www.efa.org.uk)

Department of Trade and Industry  
[www.dti.gov.uk](http://www.dti.gov.uk)

For more details about this document or if you wish to request it in alternative formats or in community languages, then please contact

Irena Hergottova  
Equality & Diversity Officer  
Equality & Diversity Team  
Walsall Council,  
Room 16b  
Council House  
Litchfield Street  
Walsall MBC WS1 1TP.

Tel: 01922 653304

Textphone: 0845 1112910

Email: [Hergottoval@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Hergottoval@walsall.gov.uk)

# Age Equality Action Plan 2006-9

## Employment

We welcome the legislation which makes workplace ageism illegal coming in the form of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006. Our Human Resources Team has already assessed the impact of this new employment regulations on personnel policies and an action plan is in place which should enable us to appropriately change our people policies in line with the new requirements. The following will be embedded in 2007:

- We will have a 'Working beyond 65 policy in place that will clarify our approach to dealing with appointments over 65, requests for working over 65 and any other retirement issues.
- All contracts issued to over-65 workers and conduct of medical checks for over-65's will be reviewed in the same way as for any other age groups.
- The age limit for joining pension scheme will be abolished. It will be unlawful for occupational pension schemes to discriminate against members or prospective members of a scheme on the basis of age.
- Eligibility criteria for gratuity award scheme, long service award and retirement award scheme will be reviewed. Upper and lower age limits on redundancy will be removed.
- We will prevent age discrimination in recruitment, including setting age limits for a post, or rejecting an applicant on the grounds of age, unless it can be objectively justified. Indirect discrimination, such as seeking "recent graduates" or preferring minimum or maximum levels of experience, will be outlawed.

For more details please contact Amanda Bull or Julie Black in Human Resources on 01922 653589 or Lisa Koc/David Duncombe in Recruitment 01922 653505.

**Action:** Human Resources will update their personnel policies in line with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulation in 2007/8.



## **Benefits & actions for potential job applicants**

The commitment and efforts to improve on age equality in employment does not end with the legal minimum. We are aware that it is not only older employees that may sometimes experience unfair treatment or adverse impact but also younger employees. We are acutely aware that our workforce is getting older and we have a shortage of younger staff. Research by ACAS, the employment relations service shows that certain recruitment practices, for example asking for a date of birth in application forms or putting down number of years experience as a job skills requirement may serve as a deterrent to many young people who may otherwise consider applying for vacancies.

In the same way, research indicates that older people are not applying for certain jobs because they perceive that they will be considered to be “too old”. A contributing factor to this perception is the way in which our job descriptions and employee specifications are presented. Closer analysis of how we write employee specifications will be undertaken to ensure that certain essential and desirable skills or experiences do not exclude applicants. Any skills which are seen to be required can often be quickly learnt or developed whilst on the job or by receiving the appropriate training and development.

**Action:** Human Resources will further improve its recruitment practices in 2007/8; our methods of advertising will carefully consider age and make sure that people of all ages will feel welcome to join our workforce. Ultimately this will help us to build a more representative workforce reflecting the diversity and demographics of our borough in our services.

## **Work Experience Placements**

The Recruitment Team is committed to the ongoing facilitation of high quality work experience placements. One hundred and forty two placements were arranged for students from schools in 2005/06. Work experience placements offer valuable experience for students of all ages – whether helping them to decide on a future career path or to form part of their studies at college or university.

The main purpose of work experience is to provide students of all ages with an insight into the ‘world of work’ and the diversity of services provided by Walsall Council. It is hoped that this in turn will lead to people, and particularly young people, considering a career in Local Government following their placement and preferably a career with Walsall Council.

Many students are not aware of the complexity and variety of services delivered, so a work experience placement gives a broader picture of the range of services provided and the professional disciplines required of such a major employer. We particularly want to ensure that our Looked After Children get access to work placements.

In order to attract different age groups into our workforce our Recruitment Team takes a number of different positive action initiatives to attract applicants from different age ranges. Specifically targeting young people through attending job / careers fairs at schools; arranging and carrying out mock interviews and attending other education industry links events. Additionally we place generic diversity advertisements in the magazines which are on display in cinemas where young people particularly are likely to see them.

**Action:** Recruitment Team will continue with the programme of Work Experience Placements for students of all ages in 2007/8 with the support of directorates.

### **Volunteering with Walsall Council (open to all age groups)**

Volunteering for Walsall council is open to anyone over the age of 18 and there is no upper age limit. Applications for volunteering will be welcomed from men and women from all races and cultures and from those who have a disability. Volunteers would need to be over 18 years of age, but there is no upper age limit. Volunteers do not need any previous experience. Guidance for arranging volunteering placements will be developed and take up of opportunities would be monitored to ensure that all groups are having the opportunity to take part. For more details regarding our recruitment, school placements or volunteering activities please contact Lisa Koc in Human Resources and Development on 653505.

**Action:** Recruitment Team will develop guidance on arranging Volunteering Placements for all ages in 2007/8.

### **Benefits & action for existing workforce**

The AES should bring benefits for our existing workforce. In particular, this means reviewing whether some of our existing practices do not negatively influence younger and older people. Through appropriate training & development we will encourage managers to review their practices to ensure that all age groups have clear and equitable targets to avoid adverse impact on particularly younger or new workers. In the same way we will encourage managers to be fair in the way they approve training and development, flexible working opportunities and work life balance options equitably to all our age groups. Our Organisational Development section already monitors training by age categories. For more details please contact Lois Stewart, Principle HR Manager.

**Action:** Human Resources Organisational Development will monitor the take up of the training and development opportunities to analyse in relation to our workforce profile during 2007/8.

## **Prevention of bullying and harassment at work**

We recognise that younger and older people, more often than other age groups, may be victims of bullying and harassment. We will make sure that our internal procedures are reviewed in order to provide an effective way of monitoring the age of the victims and feeding back particular issues of bullying, harassment and discrimination potentially linked to age.

**Action:** Human Resources will effectively monitor the age of the victims of harassment and bullying during 2007-10.

## **Raising awareness of our staff and managers**

To ensure that all staff are informed and briefed around the new age and human rights legislation and the implications this will have on our working practices we shall amend our:

- Code of conduct (Human Resources)
- Equal opportunities policy (Equality & Diversity Team and Human Resources)
- Provide training to managers involved in managing employee performance (Human Resources and Organisational Development).

In order to raise awareness of the new changes in our internal policies and communicate our objectives we will use our:

- News and Views (monthly staff newsletter)
- Team Spirit (monthly staff magazine)
- Intranet (for staff)

This scheme will be consulted on via our directorates' equality boards, who will in turn cascade information down to their services. As part of the consultation process we will invite staff to report to us examples of good and bad practice and through conducting further research ensure Walsall Council adopts recommended best practices. If staff required Employee Support Networks dedicated to younger and older workers, the Equality & Diversity Team will endeavour to find the appropriate resources to ensure the new networks can be developed and supported.

**Action:** Human Resources, Communication Unit & Equality & Diversity Team will raise awareness of the new age and human rights legislation during 2007/10.

## Service Delivery

### Improving our Equality Impact Assessment Procedure

Walsall council is committed to continuous improvement and equitable service delivery. We are constantly endeavouring to establish if any groups of our service users suffer inadvertent discrimination or inferior service delivery through any of our policies or practices. The council has established an annual process of Equality Impact Assessments which helps us to check out whether our policies and practices discriminate against particular groups of people.

We will make sure that age is included as one of the key criteria in our impact assessment procedure and that managers are aware of and understand the benefits of considering age as one of the factors. For up-to-date lists of equality impact assessments currently carried out by services please view the Council website or contact Equality and Diversity Team on 01922 653306.

**Action:** Equality & Diversity Team will revise the Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit. All Services will be advised to include age as a monitoring category when conducting Equality Impact Assessments during 2007/9.

### Age Equality Online Survey 2006

Between November and December 2006 the council ran an online consultation entitled 'Age Equality Survey - Your Views on Ageism'. The aim of this survey was to find out whether our customers, when enquiring about or accessing a service are asked about their age and whether they consider this fair. We were also keen to establish if our customers perceived that they would get a better or a different treatment if they were of a different age. Another reason for running the survey was also to check out what ages and kinds of customers may be interested in taking part in online consultations and engaging with the council on the web. Some interesting findings were generated from this consultation.

41 respondents took part in the consultation, 40% of those were aged between 35-49 years old, 17.5% were between 50-64 and 2.5% were 18-24. 10 respondents preferred not to give their age and other monitoring data. None of the respondents were over 65 or under 18. More women took part in this consultation with 53.3 % as opposed to 46.6% of men. The majority of the respondents were employed (86.6%) with a small number being retired (6.6%) and had a degree (50%) or GCSE (18.75%). As for the proportion of ethnic minorities taking place in this consultation - 6.6% were of Asian or Asian British origin and 6.6% were of White Other background.

Only 8% of respondents said that during their past contacts with the council they were asked about their age and that their age affected the way the service was delivered. These respondents were all from the 35-44 age group. With regard to communication with the council, 37% of the respondents thought that Walsall council listened to people of their age group and presented information in a way that was easy for people of their age to access and understand.

Some people said that *'although age may affect the way that people are treated that may not necessarily be "a negative thing"'*. In a feedback section some respondents were particularly concerned about older people and employment and said that *"older people have life experience and track record which shows reliability and are no longer worn out at 50, can be just as adaptable as younger people given the opportunity"*.

This survey also revealed more general findings about communication with our customers and especially using web as a communication tool. The results suggested that the people that are likely to engage with the council online are the ones who contact the council more than 5 times a year as service users (28%) or reporting a problem (26%) or asking for advice (22%). Majority of respondents generally welcomed an opportunity to be consulted through the site and wanted to be alerted to new consultations by email or SMS.

Although the survey confirmed that the council is not perceived as an age discriminatory organisation, the results confirmed to us that in future years we need to particularly look into finding innovative ways of engaging with younger and older people. The findings have contributed to implementation of our first Age Equality Scheme and also in development of the council's new improved consultation software by the Transformation Team. For more details please contact Transformation Team on 01922 658413 or Equality and Diversity Team on 01922 653304.

**Action:** Equality and Diversity Team will cascade the findings from the *Young People in Walsall* survey through directorate Equality Boards and will request services to reflect the findings in their Equality Impact Assessments, service improvement plans and Equality Action Plans.

## **Preventing age discrimination in access to services**

Through the directorates' equality action plans we will ensure that all age groups have appropriate access to services from which they can benefit; that services are advertised in appropriate formats; and that all age groups are explained their rights and options available to them appropriately. The council directorates' Equality Boards will include age as one of the key criteria in their annual programmes of equality impact assessments.

**Action:** Service Managers and directorate's Equality Boards will carry out Equality Impact Assessments during 2007-10 on key services to prevent age discrimination or exclusion.

## Eliminating age-based discrimination and bullying

Our organisation is aware that some age groups may experience harassment and bullying either from fellow citizens or those who provide services for them. Recent consultation with over-50's Forum highlighted that older people consider ageism and age discrimination including forced retirement as some of the biggest issues. The Forum would like to see actions implemented in education and training, for example encouraging schools and organisational development to promote positive images of different age groups.

In the same way as we are taking positive steps to record; monitor and reduce racist incidents, we will improve our customer monitoring procedures and train our staff to acknowledge other forms of bullying or discrimination linked to age and take the appropriate action. The council's *Older People Strategy* is committed to development of joint agency services that prevent discrimination of all kinds and particularly in the area of elder abuse. For more details please contact Older People Services on 01922 658381.

**Action:** The Equality & Diversity Team will widen out the Racist Incidents procedure and form to record and include all forms of harassment & discrimination and will provide training to staff during 2008/9.

Organisational Development & Equality and Diversity Team will widen out equalities training to include anti-discrimination on age.

## Older Persons Forum Consultation

The "Voice & Choice Older Persons Forum" aimed at over 60's was set up in 2004 through initial grant from Community Empowerment Network. The Forum is now facilitated and administered by Walsall Age Concern. The main aim of the Forum is to engage with older persons and get their feedback on issues they may be interested in. This is done in a number of ways, via home visits, day centres, producing a bi-monthly newsletter and advocacy. The Forum welcomed & supported the council's development of the Age Equality Scheme and proposed to work in partnership with Equality and Diversity Team in organising a series of consultation events in 2007/08. For more details please contact the council's Equality and Diversity Team or Tracy Pedley, Age Concern on 638825.

**Action:** Equality and Diversity Team will organise consultation with Older Persons over 60 on issues around access to services and anti-harassment and discrimination.

## Communication with our customers

We are constantly striving to improve the way we communicate with our customers. We will ensure that information we provide about our services is

not only in an appropriate format and media but the choice of the plain language and imagery is right for all different age groups.

Social Care and Inclusion directorate is in the process of improving the service on alternative formats and British Sign Language (BSL) through contracting with suppliers. This will support services in better communication and better delivery of services to customers. Equality and Diversity Team are also looking to do the same with community languages in 2007/8.

**Action:** All Services and Communication Unit will during 2007/10 improve their communication with customers in order to ensure that it is in appropriate format and language and that imagery is suitable for all different age groups.

## Community Engagement & Community Cohesion

### Involving all age groups in decision-making

In our community engagement we will seek to ensure that increased numbers of younger and older people are involved and have an impact on decision-making in our local authority. Through our equality impact assessment on the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) it was discovered that age is an issue when it comes to community involvement in the activities of LNPs.

For example older people do not feel safe and feel more vulnerable when considering attending evening meetings. The LNPs recognise the need to be more imaginative and flexible when planning and coordinating the consultation and other aspects of their work.

Some younger people have found some of the work that the LNPs have undertaken to be boring. This possibly may be because it is not presented to them in an appropriate format or in a way that fully engages them. They do not see appropriate incentives to get involved or how they can make a difference within their communities. For more information please contact Neighbourhood Programmes and Partnerships Service on 01922 654706.

**Action:** Local Neighbourhood Partnerships will continue to create links with various successful younger people community projects, for example youth clubs, and work directly with schools during 2007-10.

### Consultation with School Council Representatives

In October 2006 the council's Neighbourhood Partnerships and Programmes team organised a *Student Voice Day* - a borough-wide event aimed at creating links between the young people structures such as School Councils

and Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in order to ensure that young people can effectively be involved in decision-making. Find details of the event in the section *What We Have Achieved So Far*.

Equality and Diversity Team saw the *Student Voice Day* as an opportunity to consult on the issues that effect and concern young people in Walsall as well as find out how young people perceive the council as a service provider and employer. As young people are currently under-represented in the council's workforce it was particularly important to establish whether young school leavers would consider working for the council or not and what forms of communication young people would prefer.

Equality and Diversity Team distributed 120 questionnaires entitled *Young People in Walsall and Age Equality Scheme*. 65 questionnaires were returned, 32 of those were from girls, 25 from boys and 8 did not indicate any equality monitoring information. Majority of the girls were White British (26) and there was 1 representative from each of the following groups each - Irish British, African, White Other, Indian and mixed. 1 girl did not indicate her ethnicity. Only 1 girl had a disability. Majority of the girls were Christian, 5 indicated no religion, 1 was Sikh and 1 Greek Orthodox.

As for boys, majority of them were also British White (20), 1 was Indian and 2 Irish White. Only 1 boy had a disability. 9 boys indicated no religion, 7 indicated Christian religion and 1 Sikh.

According to the questionnaire results the three top issues that effected young people in Walsall, both girls and boys, were *bullying, local places to 'hang out' with friends and cost of activities*. On the second set of questions about what most concerned young people in Walsall, majority of both girls and boys said that *drugs and bullying* concerned them most, in the second place was *domestic violence*, further down were *school, violence and racism*.

As for discussing any issues that mattered to them the majority of the respondents said that they would discuss them with *friends and parents*. In addition, the girls would also discuss issues in a *youth club* whereas boys would prefer to discuss them with a *religious leader, social worker or counsellor*.

In response to the question what young people liked to do most, the results for gender groups differed slightly. Girls preferred to do *music*, followed by *sport, dance and computers*. Boys regarded *sport* as their favourite activity, followed by *computers and music*.

Part of this survey was also aimed at finding out what activities young people associated with the council. Both boys and girls thought that the council's activity is *recycling*, followed by *rubbish collection, collecting council tax and organising elections and community events*. 10 girls also knew that the council deals with *racist incidents*, matched by only 5 boys. Amongst the activities that young people were least aware off were for example *looking after abandoned animals or looking after children and old people*.



With regard to jobs and employment with the council - this question was answered by 19 girls out of which 8 would consider working for Walsall council and 11 would not. The reasons for negative responses were for example '*not enough money*' or '*dislike of politics*' as well as '*wanting to go into psychology, teaching, fitness, travel, writing or aviation industry*'.

Results for boys were similar, with 5 out of 13 saying they would consider working for the council, whereas 8 would not. Amongst the reasons for positive replies were for example '*would like to be a councillor, like the pension plan, want to go into teaching or finance*'. Amongst the negative replies were '*don't want to be blamed for bad things*', '*want to be a psychologist, designer, musician, chef, lawyer or IT expert*'.

It is interesting that with some of the professions the young people favoured like teaching or psychology they were not aware of the council as an employer of these categories of employees. Finally, majority of the respondents indicated that traditional forms of communication like post & letters would be preferred followed by email, text message and internet. For more details please contact Irena Hergottova in Equality and Diversity Team on 653304.

**Action:** Equality and Diversity Team will cascade findings from the School Councils consultation to Recruitment Services and Equality Boards to ensure that they reflect the feedback in future plans.

## **Communication with the public**

We need to explain to our citizens the benefits of the age equality agenda. They need to understand the aims; feel confident to give us information regarding their age when it comes to consultation or delivery of services without fear of discrimination. The council does not monitor on age just to ensure that it is not discriminating against a particular age group but in order to be able to identify gaps and take positive action where required.

This means reviewing and further improving our own consultation practices. With every piece of consultation that the council does we should be able to involve all diverse age groups and distinguish their preferences of how they want to be consulted with. In our consultation activities, for example the successful Citizen's Panel, Service User Groups, Focus Groups or devising online consultation questionnaires we will ensure that age is monitored properly and the council makes the most of the data acquired. Apart from this we shall encourage services to carry out consultation as part of their equality impact assessments.

**Action:** Transformation Team, Policy Team and Service Managers will during 2007-10 improve their consultation practices to attract/encourage people of all age groups to get involved and monitor the results.

## **Improving links with community organisations and the voluntary sector**

We shall further improve our links with community organisations particularly through our local compact arrangements. Local compact is an official agreement setting a framework for partnership working between public authorities and the voluntary sector. We will discuss and consult development and implementation of the AES with community and voluntary organisations.

Our intention is to build an effective working relationship with organisations that have a particular knowledge of age issues and work with the young or elderly population. We will involve them in our equality impact assessments, training and service delivery.

Finally and importantly, by examining our funding to voluntary sector and community organisations and ensuring that it is distributed fairly across all the different age groups. We need to ensure that organisations with particular interest in age issues are appropriately supported and also that existing voluntary sector groups that we cooperate with or financially support are representative of all different age groups. Part of this will be to ensure that people of all different age groups know how to apply for funding successfully, are considered equitably when considering funding applications and if necessary we will assist them in acquiring all the right skills to apply for the various streams of funding available. For more information please contact Ruth Allen on 01922 652077.

**Action:** Community Development Team and other services that provide funding to voluntary and community organisations during 2007-10 will ensure that organisations with particular interest in age issues are appropriately supported.

## **Community Cohesion and Community Engagement Strategies**

The council is working in partnership with Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (WBSP) in drafting a community cohesion strategy and action plan. The aim is to have the consultation and strategy completed in 2007. This strategy will ensure that inter-generational issues are included and that different age groups and communities are brought together and there is greater understanding of each others needs and concerns.

WBSP in partnership with Walsall council is also drafting our Community Engagement Strategy. Consultation on this document is carried out by Community Empowerment Network (CEN) during 2007/09. Information in this document is particularly useful for services that are preparing consultations.

**Action:** Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership will implement the Community Engagement Strategy during 2006/7.

## **What we have achieved so far**

### **Student Voice Day 2006**

As part of the nationwide event Local Democracy Week, Walsall Council has organised an event for all secondary schools in the borough entitled *Student Voice Day* in October 2006. 70 pupils attended from 11 schools. The aims of the event were to inform young people aged 11-18 of the current local decision making structures operating in Walsall and highlight how they can get involved in decision-making as groups or individuals and thus influence the policies and delivery of services. Overall aim was also to bring the process of Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in line with the young people structures such as the school councils. For more details please contact Janice Clews on 652285.

### **Youth Opinions Unite**

Walsall Council has an innovative programme of consulting with young people through our youth involvement and youth engagement programme called Youth Opinions Unite (YOU). YOU is part of Walsall Youth Service and is supported by many organisations including Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership, Black Country Connexions' local management committee, Children and Young Persons Strategic Partnership, Community Empowerment Network and Local Neighbourhood Partnerships. The process also feeds into the Black Country Connexions Youth Forum and UK Youth Parliament.

As part of this long-term project groups of young people from across Walsall meet at a district and borough wide level to help influence key decision-making and policy issues involving young people. It also acts as a consultative body. Through YOU, people have found employment as Youth Support Workers, young people have been trained to work with other youngsters whilst others have received training and developed new skills.

The main way someone can get involved is putting themselves forward to become a member of one of the district groups. The YOU process operates within six districts of Walsall: Willenhall, Darlaston, Aldridge South & Streetly, Aldridge North & Brownhills, Bloxwich, and Walsall Central. The district groups feed into the borough wide group. It is made up of young people from each area to discuss issues raised at district level and also issues fed down from the steering group. The steering group is made up of people elected from the borough wide group and professionals working within Walsall for groups such as Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership, who meet every month.

If you would like to find out more about YOU meetings, projects, events or the forthcoming elections contact a member of the YOU team on 01922 643600 or

01922 650402/650401 or email [youthopinionsunite@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:youthopinionsunite@yahoo.co.uk) or check out the website [www.youthopinionsunite.co.uk](http://www.youthopinionsunite.co.uk)

## **Over-50 Forum**

In 2006 Walsall council, together with PCT, facilitated the establishment of the Over-50's Forum linked to the Better Government for Older People agenda and West Midlands Older People's Advisory Group. The Forum is an independent umbrella group run by its members who wish to see themselves and their peers have a voice. The Forum encompasses diverse organisations from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups to various health interest organisations, women's groups and disability groups.

The Forum held its first consultation event in May 2006. 120 people attended and interpreters were provided in a number of languages. Members on the conference discussed issues like ageism and identifying the best forms of consultation with older people - like for example use of small local forums, assistance of vehicles.

Series of workshops were organised during the day including the workshop on 'rooting out discrimination'. People were particularly concerned about 'forced retirement', encouraging schools to promote positive images of various age groups, access to employment, accessing jobs databases and accountability of council staff when it comes to harassment or discrimination or not getting access. The Over-50's Forum produces a quarterly Newsletter that keeps the community informed of the activities and useful for distribution of information that maybe relevant to the community.

## **Implementation of the Age Equality Scheme**

### **Further Consultation**

A council wide *Consultation Group* coordinates an annual consultation intention plan and diary. If services require guidance in undertaking consultation on age related issues, the *Consultation Group* to provide help with running focus groups, devising consultation questionnaires, ensuring that consultation is representative of the local population or can focus on reaching various groups within the local communities.

Consultation on equality and diversity Issues is a responsibility of Equality Boards and services that carry out annual Equality Impact Assessments (EIA). Directorates and services are required to plan for consultation and feedback in their annual budgeting process, service Plans and continuous improvement plans.

### **Publication & Communication**

Walsall council values the input of the diverse age groups and communities. We will inform the public of the various equality and diversity issues and events through a variety of mechanisms and formats such as:

- Corporate Plan and Performance Plan
- Council's website/Walsall Pride - Council's free newspaper for residents
- Community representative meetings & conferences
- Equalities Partnership

In addition, the directorates are required to plan for consultation and feedback through their:

- Annual budgeting process
- Directorate/Service Plans

Information will also be put into various accessible formats on request, for example

- Braille
- Audio-tape
- Translations into community languages
- Provision of community language interpreters including British Sign Language, where required.

## **Access to Information & Services**

Access to information and services has been a key priority of the Council for many years. Here is a summary of some of the services, policies, procedures and practices that contribute to making information and services accessible to all age groups:

### **First Stop Shop**

The Council has opened a first stop shop in the Civic Centre which enables one point of access to a number of services and information to the public.

### **Interpretation and Translation Service**

This has been provided in the past by request directly by services who have bought in the service from a range of external agencies.

### **Bi-lingual Staff**

For many years WMBC has employed bi-lingual staff in key front-line services to support the council's aim of making all services accessible to the BME community.

### **Community Newspaper**

The council's community newspaper, Walsall Pride is translated into some community languages based on specific need and requests and is delivered to all homes in the borough.

### **Minority Ethnic Press**

The council does publish articles, information and job adverts in the local minority ethnic press.

### **Service Resources**

Directorates are planning and budgeting for which of our key plans, service

leaflets and other publicity material should be available/or are usually requested in minority languages. Directorates will also be encouraging groups to tell them on what information and in what language and format they would like to be informed, consulted with, and provided services in.

### **Support for Community and Voluntary Groups**

The Council values the work of the community and voluntary sector, in providing services for local communities, and in providing a voice for local people, including various age groups, those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged, in local partnerships. The sector, supported by Walsall Voluntary Action (WVA) and the Walsall Community Empowerment Network (CEN), plays a key role in the Walsall Borough Strategic Partnership (WBSP), and in the nine Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNP).

### **Dealing with Complaints**

Specific complaints can be made by service users or the public generally whether to inform us of poor service or feeling a victim or witnessing an incidents or harassment. Employees can do the same through the anti-harassment policy or formal employment processes such as the Grievance procedure as long as it involves another employee and not service users or the public. There is a need to focus on informal workable solutions where appropriate, before formal procedures are invoked and mediation is always an option on offer for both service users and employees before complaints become formal or as an action after investigation.

### Summary of Age Equality Action Plan (AES) 2007-10

Action	Lead	Timescale	Resources
<b>Strategic Policy Development</b>			
1. Develop and draft Age Equality Scheme & consult with major stakeholders.	Equality & Diversity Team	March 2007	
2. Agree the Age Equality Action implementation plan internally and externally and monitor annually and every three years.	CEG & directorates (Equality & Diversity Team)	Annual reviews & 3-year review	
3. Agree Final version of AES with Executive Management Team and Cabinet & publish final version on the web.	Equality & Diversity Team	Jan to March 07	
<b>Employment</b>			
4. Facilitate the development of Employee Support Networks for younger & older workers.	Equality & Diversity Team	2007/8	
5. Include age as a monitoring category in the annual Employment Monitoring Report	Human Resources	2007/8 & from then on annually	
6. Amend the following policies: - pension scheme criteria - gratuity & award scheme - long service awards - retirement award scheme - redundancy	Human Resources	2007/8	
7. Carry out equality impact assessment of the sickness policy, particular its impact on age groups	Human Resources	2007/8	
8. Raise managers' awareness of the new age equality policies and the council's scheme	Human Resources & Equality and Diversity Team	2008/9	

9. Pilot age anti-discrimination training aimed at front-line staff and raise awareness of the new age and human rights legislation	Organisation Development & Equality and Diversity Team	2008/09/10	
10. Organisational Development to use the monitoring on training to match against the workforce profile analysis.	Organisational Development	2007/8	
11. Continue with the programme of Work Experience Placements.	Recruitment	2007/8	
12. Develop guidance for arranging Volunteering Placements.	Recruitment	2007/8	
<b>Service Delivery</b>			
13. Amend Equality Impact Assessment Procedure and issue guidance to staff regarding Age Equality in Service Delivery	Equality and Diversity Team	2007/8	
14. Identify policies/services with under-representation of certain age groups and promote greater age diversity of service users in age-neutral services	Equality Boards	Ongoing	
15. Carry out & evaluate a series of customer surveys in different formats focusing on age issues, access and anti-discrimination. Use the results to inform training.	Equality and Diversity Team & Age Concern (Older Persons Voice and Choice Forum)	2007/8	
16. Ensure that service information and communication with customers are in appropriate format and language and imagery are suitable for different age groups.	Equality Boards & Communication Unit	2008-10	
<b>Community Engagement &amp; Community Cohesion</b>			



17. Improve council's consultation practices to monitor age effectively so that various age groups can be targeted and consulted effectively.	Policy Team and Equality Boards	2007-10	
18. Publicise age equality related information in major forums and newsletters Over-50 Forum, Older Persons Forum (Over-60).	Equality & Diversity Team	2008	
19. Improve links with community organisations and voluntary sector bodies actively involved in working with various under-represented age groups	Community Development Team & Local Neighbourhood Partnerships	2007/8	
20. Build generational issues and bringing together different age groups and communities through the Community Cohesion Strategy.	WBSP & Equality & Diversity Team	2007/8	

### Appendix 2: AES Consultation/Involvement Plan (Oct to Dec 2006)

Key Stakeholders	Action	Lead	Deadline
<b>Elected Members</b>			
Cabinet Portfolio Holder	Send Draft AES	Irena Hergottova	October 2006
Cabinet	Present final AES after full consultation	Cabinet Portfolio -holder Cllr Garry Perry	Jan 07
<b>Senior Managers</b>			
Corporate Equalities Group	Send drafts and final version	Abida Akram	October 2006
Executive Management Team	Send consultation draft & final draft for comment	Julie Ball	October/November 2006 Final version Jan/Feb 07
Equality Boards	Through Equality Champions	Equality Champions	October 2006
<b>Employees</b>			

Women's Employee Network	Consult on draft AES and presentation	Irena Hergottova/Vanisha Parmar	Oct - Dec2006
BME Employee Network	Consult on draft AES and presentation	Irena Hergottova/Vanisha Parmar	Oct- Dec 2006
Disabled Employee Network	Consult on draft AES and presentation	Irena Hergottova/Vanisha Parmar	Oct- Dec 2006
Sexuality Equality Employee Network (ENFORCE)	Consult on draft AES via post	Abida Akram/Vanisha Parmar	Oct- Dec 2006
<b>Specific Services &amp; Internal Contacts</b>			
Equality and Diversity Officers	As above	Irena Hergottova	October 2006
Human Resources	Direct consultation & through Equality Boards	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Programmes and Partnerships	As above	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Transformation Team	As above	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Policy Team/Corporate Performance Unit	As above	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Regeneration	As Above	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Youth Services	As Above	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Older People Services	As Above	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Trade Unions	Employees Relations Forum - agenda & presentation	Irena Hergottova & Abida Akram	November 2006
<b>External</b>			
Age Concern	Send draft AES for discussion and consultation	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Over-50 Forum	Presentation & post	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Youth Opinion Unite	Questionnaire & post	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Walsall Disability Forum	Post	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006

Black & Minority Ethnic Alliance	Post	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Community Empowerment Network	Meeting, presentation & post	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Walsall's Women's Forum	Meeting, presentation & post	Irena Hergottova	October/November 2006
Schools – Young People through NLP Event – 13 <sup>th</sup> Oct 06	Written Questionnaire	Irena Hergottova/Janice Clews	Oct 06
Customers through Website Pilot	e-consultation through web.	Irena Hergottova & Simon Corden	Oct –Dec 06
ACSERG	Post & Meeting	Irena Hergottova/Abida Akram	Oct – Dec 06
UMO	Post	Irena Hergottova/Abida Akram	Oct-Dec 06
Local Neighbourhood Partnerships	Post	Irena Hergottova/Abida Akram	Oct-Dec 06

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