

**Tower Hamlets  
Religion / Belief Equality Scheme  
2009-12**

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## **Executive Summary**

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This is the Council's first Religion/Belief Equality Scheme and it aims to promote equality and eliminate discrimination for all Tower Hamlets residents and staff regardless of their religion or belief. We are a unique borough in terms of the pattern of religion/belief; over 80% of residents claim a religious belief while the third largest religion/belief category is people who have no religious belief. We also have the largest proportion of Muslim residents of any local authority in the country. The history of the borough as a jumping off point for new communities has contributed to the religious diversity of the area.

Although this is our first Religion/Belief Equality Scheme the Council has a strong track record of work in this area. Our work on promoting community cohesion and involving communities has been widely recognised as best practice. The borough's Interfaith Forum has been supported by the Council since its establishment in 2004 and provides an effective mechanism for involving faith communities in shaping and scrutinising services as well as strengthening the links between communities. At an operational level Council services have worked with faith communities to respond to issues of common concern in areas as varied as child protection, domestic violence and recycling.

This Equality Scheme identifies the Council's priorities for addressing inequality experienced by specific faith communities and people of non-religious belief in relation to the five Community Plan themes of: One Tower Hamlets; a Prosperous Community; a Safe & Supportive Community; a Healthy Community and; a Great Place to Live. It also identifies our priorities as an employer.

This Equality Scheme also contains a set of principles which will guide our approach to delivering our commitment to tackling inequality and discrimination based on religion/belief:

- To make Tower Hamlets a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together
- To challenge discrimination in all its forms, in relation to all people who work, live or visit the borough
- To create an inclusive workplace in which all staff feel their contribution is valued
- To ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged as a result of their religion or belief
- To address inequality which arises from an individual or group's religion or belief
- To recognise the role of the faith communities in contributing to the wellbeing of people in borough and support them to fulfil this role

## Introduction

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The Council's vision and the vision of the Tower Hamlets Partnership is to improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Tower Hamlets.

Everyone should realise their full potential in Tower Hamlets. The 2020 Vision Community Plan outlines our aspiration of 'One Tower Hamlets'. One Tower Hamlets is about reducing the inequalities and poverty that we see around us, strengthening cohesion and making sure our communities continue to live well together. Most of all, One Tower Hamlets is about recognising that we all have a part to play in making this a reality.

One way of ensuring this vision is to focus our attention on inequalities experienced by our residents. The Council has been awarded Level 5 of the Equality Standard and is one of the best councils in the country for its equalities work. This religion/belief equality scheme, along with others for gender, disability, race, sexual orientation and age will enable us to provide services and develop policies and strategies which make sure that we provide for equality for all. We plan to combine these schemes into a single Equalities scheme in 2010 to best serve the individual needs of each of our residents. This reflects the move nationally towards a Single Equalities Bill which recognises the whole experience of every person.

We recognise that people may experience specific disadvantages due to their religion/belief. Misconceptions and prejudice about specific religions or beliefs and the people who hold them can lead to them being socially and economically disadvantaged, excluded and marginalised. We believe that people of all faiths and none have the right to equality of opportunity and make a significant and valuable contribution to the community at large. As such, this first Religion/Belief Equality Scheme will focus on ensuring that we are able to respond appropriately to their needs.

We are already doing significant work to tackle the particular inequalities faced by specific faith communities. One of the key ways in which this is evidenced is through the support given to the Interfaith Forum. The Forum embraces almost 300 organisations, meets every two months, has its own website, regular newsletter and organises a series of events in Interfaith Week. The Forum also plays an active role in other local groups and activities - on the Partnership Management Group and in the Race and Hate Crime Interagency Forum as well as providing a useful partner in monitoring ongoing community tensions. The Council also works with faith communities on a number of service issues, including: the Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education (SACRE) which brings together representatives from all faiths to agree on the local curriculum for religious education; Children's Services Working with Muslim Families sub-group of the local Safeguarding Children's Board; Jewish Care provide day care services to older people in the Jewish community and; support

for a range of public events and activities throughout the year to promote understanding of all the borough's faith communities and includes annual events to mark St George's Day, Holocaust Memorial Day and Islam Awareness Week.

This Religion/Belief Equality Scheme will ensure that religion/belief equality is delivered by multiple services across the Council. To this end we aim to put in place policies and services which enable everyone to access our services regardless of their religion/belief and to improve outcomes for all. We also want to ensure that people of all faiths and none have choice and control in decisions affecting their lives.

### **Key priorities**

Within each of the Council's Equality Schemes we have identified three priority areas of inequality which require significant and sustained action across a number of Council services. These priority areas provide the Council with some high level direction about where attention and resources need to be targeted to make real progress.

In reaction to religion/belief inequality, these priorities are set out below and are explored further in this Equality Scheme. Linked to poverty all three sit at heart of inequality in Tower Hamlets. To make a dramatic shift against the inequality of Tower Hamlets and make progress on the wide range of issues identified in each of Equality Schemes it is recommended that investment to address these four core inter-connected areas will lead that change.

- Increase economic activity among Muslim women
- Address shortage of suitable social housing which has a disproportionate effect on Muslim families
- Increase the extent to which people of different faiths say they get on well together

## **Religion / Belief Equality Legislation**

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The Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations came into force in December 2003 (at the same time as similar provisions covering sexual orientation; regulations against discrimination on grounds of age followed in 2006). These Regulations make it unlawful for employers to discriminate on the grounds of religion & belief.

The regulations in this field apply to discrimination on grounds of religion, or religious or philosophical belief (the requirement for philosophical beliefs to be similar to religious beliefs was removed by the passing of Part 2 of the Equality Act in 2006). They cover discrimination on grounds of 'perceived' as well as 'actual' religion or belief, and the religion or belief of someone with whom the person associates. It is also illegal to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief in the provision of goods, facilities and services, and the disposal and management of premises.

The Human Rights Act (1998) sets out the right of everybody to have access to public services and the right to be treated fairly and with dignity. It includes the right to being safe and protected from harm and the right to take an active part in your community and society which have particular implications for our work with young and older people. It prohibits discrimination on a wide range of grounds and case law has extended this to include age.

## **How we developed our Religion/Belief Equality Scheme**

The development of our Scheme has been led by the Corporate Scrutiny & Equalities Team. This has been supported by officers from the Corporate Equalities Steering Group (CESG) who are the key equalities representatives from each Directorate. The development of the scheme has followed a clear project plan, the steps of which are outlined below:

### **Gathering Baseline Information**

A comprehensive baseline exercise was undertaken using a combination of research and input from staff across the Council including analysis of demographic and statistical information, analysis of existing consultation and a review of relevant Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs).

### **Consultation Exercises**

From the baseline information we were able to identify a number of areas for further examination and discussion. To test our findings and to gain further input as to which areas should be our priorities we undertook a number of consultation activities with residents, voluntary and statutory agencies and members of staff. This involved public events, online surveys, targeted consultation with specific communities. During the course of the consultation we engaged with all the major faith groups in the borough as well as people of non-religious beliefs.

### **Setting Priorities and Objectives**

Using feedback from our consultation and baseline exercises, a number of key themes for priority and overarching activity have emerged.

## **Corporate Framework for Diversity and Equality**

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### **Delivery framework**

Valuing diversity is one of four core values of Tower Hamlets Council. We will promote diversity and equality in everything we do to improve the life for everyone living, working and visiting Tower Hamlets. We will build upon this by working with the Tower Hamlets Partnership to provide accessible and responsive services that enable everyone to take part in the social, cultural and economic wealth of the borough. Achieving this is central to delivering the Council's vision, is linked to the Strategic Plan priorities and objectives and forms a driving force within the Community Plan and key to creating a cohesive community.

### **Our aims and values**

As a service provider we will:

- Promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination in the planning and delivery of our services in terms of age, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, health and income status
- Promote good relations between communities and address negative stereotyping of any groups
- Ensure that all residents have equal opportunity to participate in the democratic process
- Tackle harassment relating to a person's age, disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, health and income status

As an employer we will:

- Develop, review and promote policies and practices that ensure equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination for our workforce in all areas of employment (including recruitment, retention, learning and development, promotion, grievance, disciplinary and retirement)
- Ensure that our workforce reflects the diverse nature of the borough

We will recognise our community leadership role and use this to work towards a cohesive community in which inequality is tackled and equality promoted.

Our commitment is supported by a number of legal duties that require us to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, including:

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975
- Race Relations Act 1976
- Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005
- Human Rights Act 1998



- 2004 Employment Regulations on Religion and Faith

However under current legislation, the requirements to address inequality and discrimination and promote equality vary between equality 'strand'. For example, while under current legislation we are required to address discrimination against employees on the basis of all six equality strands, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and religion / belief, it is only in relation to race, gender and disability that this duty extends to the provision of services and the active promotion of equality. We believe however that we have a strong moral and social duty to recognise that discrimination takes place and inequality exists for individuals and groups belonging to all of the six equality strands. We are therefore committed to going beyond the requirements laid down in law to address all six equality strands and to do everything that we can to challenge prejudice and discrimination and promote better understanding and respect between all people.

To demonstrate our commitment to all six equality strands, the Council has gone beyond the legal requirement to produce Equality Schemes in relation to gender and disability and has published Schemes covering Religion/Belief, Age and Sexual Orientation equality. Each Scheme sets out what we know about the profile of our community in relation to the relevant strand and the nature of inequality experienced by people as a result of this element of their identity. The Schemes also contain a summary of the action which the Council and partners will undertake to address inequality and discrimination in relation to this equality strand.

### **How we will deliver our commitment**

Tackling discrimination and promoting equality requires action at corporate, directorate, service, team and individual levels. At a corporate level the six Equality Schemes and the overall Diversity and Equality Action Plan identifies priority areas for work on equalities across the organisation. The Diversity and Equality Action Plan is agreed by Cabinet annually and monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee six-monthly along with a summary of progress against each of the Equality Schemes.

Below we describe the processes and procedures we have put in place to embed the delivery of our commitment to promote equality in relation to all six strands within everything that we do as a Council:

- Undertake **equality impact assessments** of both new and existing policies and services
- Ensure that all our **team plans** incorporate relevant diversity and equality objectives and targets
- Ensure all new staff participate in Council **equality induction training** processes
- Ensure that our policies are compliant with **equality legislation**

- **Involve communities, staff and stakeholders** in the design, review and scrutiny of our services and employment practices
- Increase the extent to which our **workforce reflects the local community**
- Using our **procurement** powers to make sure that organisations providing services on our behalf work in line with this policy
- **Monitoring the equality profile** of people using and benefiting from our services to enable us to identify groups which are not accessing services
- **Provide information and access** to our services in accessible ways

## **The profile of religion/belief in Tower Hamlets**

The consultation for the Religion/Belief Equality Scheme revealed a wide variety of views and opinions about the way in which the Council relates to faith communities and questions about religion/belief. These can be broadly drawn into the following three categories:

- 'Instrumentalising' of faith based organisations to deliver government agendas and a failure to engage with faith communities on areas of importance to them. This view was frequently put forward by participants concerned that current models for faith communities to engage with public bodies required them to fit within certain predefined terms and this limited their independence and advocacy role.
- That there is an over-anxiety among Council officers about proselytising and unreasonable requirements on faith based organisations to adopt secular language in order to be allowed to tender for contracts to provide services on behalf of the Council. Some participants pointed out that this approach was at odds with a parallel commitment to increase 'faith literacy' in the public sector and to recognise the important role faith communities play in responding to the welfare needs of communities.
- That the Council is too close to faith communities and that this makes it difficult for people with no religious beliefs or who wish to keep their religious beliefs private, to be open about their beliefs

The lack of consensus about the role of the Council in addressing issues of religion/belief and the fact that there was no discernable pattern in terms of which groups/individuals subscribed to which view, illustrates the unique nature of religion / belief as an equality strand. Despite this variety of views, there has emerged through consultation and research for the RBES a set of principles which should guide our approach to delivering our commitment to tackling inequality and discrimination based on religion/belief:

- To make Tower Hamlets a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together
- To challenge discrimination in all its forms, in relation to all people who work, live or visit the borough
- To create an inclusive workplace in which all staff feel their contribution is valued
- To ensure that no individual or group is disadvantaged as a result of their religion or belief

- To address inequality which arises from an individual or group's religion or belief
- To recognise the role of the faith communities in contributing to the wellbeing of people in borough and support them to fulfil this role

### **Religion/belief in the community**

The profile of religion and belief in Tower Hamlets is very distinctive. During the 2001 Census seventy eight percent of residents stated that they has a religious belief, which is significantly higher than the national average. The borough has the highest proportion of Muslim people of any local authority area in the country, at 36.4%. However, fourteen percent of people described themselves as having no religious belief, which makes them the third largest religion/belief group in the borough. The section below describes what we know about the demographic profile of individuals and groups of people who hold religious and non-religious beliefs in the borough, as well of those of no belief. It then goes onto describe some of the ways in which faith communities both past and present have contributed to and shaped the borough.

#### Demographic profile of religion/belief groups

The information in this section draws extensively on the findings of the 2001 Census, it is therefore important to note that while these statistics provide the most comprehensive information available on the profile of religion and belief in the borough it is likely that this profile has changed in the last eight years as the population of the borough has changed and adapted. Information on the profile of religion/belief across London is taken from the Greater London Authority's 'Key Facts for Diverse Communities: Ethnicity and faith' published in 2007.

#### **Buddhist community, approx. 1%**

The proportion of Buddhists living in Tower Hamlets is three times higher than the national average. The London Buddhist Centre in Bethnal Green is a major centre for the Buddhist community. The Centre and surrounding area is home to several residential Buddhist communities along with a number of associated businesses and organisations. The Centre is run by the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and a large proportion of people who attend the centre are from a western European background. The Buddhist population however is spread across the borough, ranging from 0.44 percent of the population in St Dunstan's and Stepney Green to 1.6 percent in Blackwall and Cubitt Town.

#### **Christian community, approx. 39%**

There are numerous Christian communities in the borough from a variety of theological and ethnic backgrounds.

Obtaining accurate and up to date information about congregations is difficult as a number of newer Christian communities do not have dedicated accommodation

and may meet in churches belonging to other faith communities or in other informal venues. However the Interfaith Forum's database of faith organisations includes 134 Christian organisations, including a large number of Black-led churches, as well as Philippino and Vietnamese congregations. In addition we know that there are thirteen Catholic churches in the Tower Hamlets Deanery and in 2007 the total number of people attending Sunday Mass at these churches was just under five thousand. We also know twenty Anglican congregations in parishes in the borough. In addition there are Chaplaincies in Docklands, Barts & the London hospitals, the London Metropolitan University. There is an Anglican community based at the Royal Foundation of St Katherine.

In terms of age the community is varied, with a larger proportion of older people than other faith communities. Christian communities are varied in terms of ethnicity with significant numbers of Roman Catholics from eastern Europe and Pentecostal Christians from African countries.

Geographically the proportion of Christian people varies significantly across the borough, from eighteen percent in Spitalfields and Banglatown to sixty percent in Bow East.

#### **Hindu community, approx. 0.8%**

The Hindu community in the borough is proportionally one of the smallest in London. Within the borough Hindu people are geographically dispersed. The majority of Hindus in the borough come from Bangladesh - a fact which illustrates the importance of not relying on ethnicity as a proxy for religion/belief. A smaller number of Hindus come from Pakistan, India and elsewhere. The number of Hindus in the borough appears to be increasing as a result of increased migration.

Data on the borough's Hindu population is limited, however London-wide data suggests that Hindu people tend to be younger than the capital average, with thirty six percent of the population falling into the 25-44 age group.

#### **Jewish community, approx. 0.93%**

There has been Jewish population in London since the eleventh century, however it was from 1881 that the rate of migration of Jewish people to the East End increased significantly. The capital's first Ashkenazi synagogue was built in Aldgate in 1722. By 1901 the Jewish population of Tower Hamlets was over 50,000 and there were estimated to be 150 synagogues in the East End. Significant migration to north and east London has taken place over the last years. The remaining community is older than the borough average.

#### **Muslim community, approx. 36.4%**

Tower Hamlets has the largest proportion of Muslim people of any local authority area in the country. The 2001 Census shows that the vast majority of the Muslim population is Bangladeshi, however there are also significant numbers of Somali,

Algerian and Moroccan Muslims living in the borough as well as smaller numbers from Arab countries, the Indian subcontinent and eastern Europe<sup>1</sup>.

In Tower Hamlets, 61% of the under 15 population are Muslim whereas 21% are Christian. In contrast, amongst the 50+ population 61% identify as Christian and 19% as Muslim.

The youthful profile of the Muslim community and the significant migration into the borough of Muslim people from other parts of Britain and the world make the Muslim community the fastest growing faith community in the borough<sup>2</sup>.

### **Sikh community, approx. 0.35%**

The proportion of Sikhs living in Tower Hamlets is significantly smaller than the national proportion for England (0.67 percent). The majority of the population in the borough are from an Indian background. There are large Sikh communities in neighbouring boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Walham Forest and some people from these areas travel into the borough to worship at the two Gurdwaras in the east of the borough.

Data on the borough's Sikh population is limited, however London-wide data suggests that Sikhs living in the capital are slightly younger than the London average with half the proportion of pensioners, compared to other groups.

### **People with non-religious beliefs**

The 2001 Census question on religion/belief provided limited data on non-religious belief. People who did not wish to tick one of the religions included on the census form had to tick either "no religion" or not complete the section. The figure given for "No religion" therefore includes people who ticked 'None' on the religion question plus those who wrote in Jedi Knight, Agnostic, Atheist and Heathen and those who ticked 'Other' but did not write in any religion. In Tower Hamlets this was 18%, making it the third largest group, after Christianity and Islam.

There is limited information on people with non-religious belief in the borough. London-wide figures suggest that people with non religious belief are more likely to live in cohabiting couple households than other Londoners, are slightly more likely to live in one person households and significantly less likely to live in married couple households. The age profile of people with no religious belief is distinctive in that significantly more people are between 25-44 than the London average, whereas there are significantly less older people than in other religion/belief groups.

### History of religion/belief in Tower Hamlets

Historically the nature of new communities settling in the East End has partly

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<sup>1</sup> 'New Communities in Tower Hamlets: Characteristics, trends and challenges', Praxis (2007)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

been defined by their religion – French Huguenots (Calvinist Protestants), Irish Catholics, East European Jews, Bangladeshi Muslims are the most well known. For each group faith has been a driver to participation in public life, whether through charity work, community engagement or politics. There is a strong tradition of faith-based charities locally which often pick up those people who may fall through the net of statutory provision. Faith organisations are themselves either the owners or the guardians of a range of community assets including buildings, land and their congregations/communities.

### **Buildings and land**

Many of the borough's historic faith communities have erected buildings both as places of worship and to serve social needs of communities past and present. These historic buildings are often linked to green space. There are also non-purpose built sites which have been used and adapted by faith communities to meet changing community needs. In 2007 English Heritage funded a research programme to map all places of worship in the borough and produced a guide to sites, both those in use and those now lying empty. This map can be found at:

<http://www.religionandplace.org.uk/>

While many of these buildings are valuable assets, they are also a costly inheritance and meeting the costs of maintaining, adapting and repairing these often historic sites, many of which are listed, is a significant financial challenge for a number of faith communities. Smaller and newer faith communities have different problems finding accommodation to meet their needs. As a joint Community Development Foundation/Home Office needs analysis report found in 2006, "the need to find suitable accommodation for their worship and internal needs saps the energy for becoming involved in wider issues"<sup>3</sup>.

### **Charitable work and giving**

There is a strong tradition of faith-based charities locally which often pick up those people who may fall through the net of statutory provision, both from their own faith communities and the wider population. Such charities are a proportion of our local 'third sector'. The foundation of the Salvation Army in Whitechapel in the late nineteenth century is perhaps just one of the more famous examples of what this might mean. A study by Praxis, a local voluntary organisation, published in 2007 on the needs of new communities in the borough noted the important role faith communities can play in providing new residents with links to wider communities, services and social support<sup>4</sup>.

Social and support services provided by faith communities in the borough are wide ranging and vary in terms of scale and formality. Examples of services include supplementary religious and non-religious education, drug treatment

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<sup>3</sup> 'Needs Analysis of Capacity Building in Faith Communities in Tower Hamlets', CDF/Home Office Research (2006)

<sup>4</sup> 'New Communities in Tower Hamlets: Characteristics, trends and challenges', Praxis (2007)

services, English language classes to welfare advice and family conflict services.



## Reasonable Adjustments

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This section provides guidance about factors to take into account when delivering a service, running an activity or event, providing funding or scheduling meetings to ensure that you promote equality and do not adversely affect any individual or group as a result of their religion or belief. It is important to note that these are intended to highlight some of the most common barriers to promotion of religion/belief equality, it is not a comprehensive guide to providing an equitable service and it is important that we take a proactive approach to identifying individual needs rather than presuming what we know the best solution. The key principle here is to ensure that it is clear that efforts will be made to accommodate needs and preferences based on religion or belief and encourage staff, service users or residents to discuss their needs where they feel there may be a barrier to their access or involvement in an activity. A participant in one of the RBES consultation events said:

*“I would like the Council to understand the importance of faith but not to presume they know all about it in terms of how I would like services provided, make no assumptions please!”*

### Timing of activities and events

- The timing of activities can affect who is able to attend. For many faith communities some days and times of year are considered holy and this may affect their ability to take part in activities run during that time. For example Friday lunchtimes are a key time for Muslims many of whom attend *Jumma* prayers at that time. Members of Jewish communities mark *Shabbat* from sundown on Friday to dusk on Saturday and many refrain from work during this time. For Christians Sunday is the holy day and Eucharist services are held during the day.
- A calendar of major religious festivals and events is produced each year by the Interfaith Forum and the Council’s Diversity and Equality Team, this is available at:

<http://www.faithintowerhamlets.com/default/1150.calendar/index.htm>

### Guidance:

- When planning meetings, the following general principles should be followed:
  - Where the membership of the group is known, future meeting dates should be made available to all members of the group and members invited to indicate if they are unable to attend.
  - Where attendees of meetings are not known in advance, for example public meetings, dates of major religious festivals should be avoided. These dates can be found on the

## Interfaith Calendar.

### Food and catering

- Many people have religious and non-religious beliefs about which foods they are and are not able to eat.
- When providing food, it is important that anyone taking part in the activity is invited to let you know if they have any specific dietary requirements as early on in the planning of the activity as possible.
- If you are unable to contact attendees in advance of the meeting then steps can be taken to maximise the opportunities for attendees to eat, for example vegetarian food is more widely acceptable than meat. Where meat is provided it is important to recognise that Sikhs and some other meat eaters will not eat halal meat. Hindus do not eat beef.

Further information about the food requirements of different faith communities can be found in the ACAS publication 'Religion or Belief in the Workplace':

<http://www.efbelief.org.uk/legal/ACAS%20Guide%20-%20Religion%20and%20Belief.pdf>

## **The story so far**

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The Council has worked closely with faith communities and organisations for a number of years on a wide variety of issues of common concern from targeted projects to address inequality for specific communities to the promotion of community cohesion and service provision. Faith communities are represented at all levels of decision making within the Tower Hamlets Partnership.

A number of projects and initiatives involving faith communities in the borough have been recognised as innovative by external bodies. For example the School Attendance Project run as a partnership between Children's Services and the London Muslim Centre was highlighted as a key area of work in the Council's Beacon award for Getting Closer to Communities in 2004. The Council supported Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum has featured in a number of best practice publications by the IDeA and Interfaith Network of the UK. In 2008 the 'Faith in the City' project commissioned as part of the Council's Preventing Violent Extremism programme was awarded the Government Office for London award for innovation.

Some examples of existing work with faith communities to tackle inequality and promote cohesion include:

- The commissioning of Jewish Care to provide targeted day care services to older Jewish residents
- The development of a 'Working with Muslim Families' sub-group of the Local Safeguarding Children Board to develop the capacity of local statutory and faith organisations to ensure high standards of child protection
- The establishment of the Community Cohesion Contingency Planning and Tension Monitoring Group to bring together representatives of faith and community groups to identify and respond proactively to tension between communities
- A training programme for Muslim women to qualify as football coaches, delivered by the Muslim Women's Collective

## **Understanding equality in the context of religion/belief in Tower Hamlets**

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The section below describes what we know about how people of religious and non-religious belief and those of no belief experience inequality and disadvantage in Tower Hamlets. This section is organised according to the themes of the Tower Hamlets 2008-20 Community Plan and draws on the ten domains of inequality set out in the Equality Mapping Framework.

### ***ONE TOWER HAMLETS***

#### **Capacity to enjoy individual, family and social life**

Throughout the consultation on the RBES people told us how much they valued the opportunity to celebrate religious festivals and to have these festivals recognised. Both within the Council and in the wider community, religious festivals are celebrated throughout the year. Staff told us that they were keen for recognition of these festivals to be formalised to ensure that the major festivals of all faith communities in the borough receive coverage and provide an opportunity for people of all faiths and none to learn about one another.

#### Objectives

- Recognise major religious festivals of all the borough's faith communities and ensure publicity enhances interfaith understanding

#### **Capacity to be and express yourself, and have self-respect**

In 2008 over seventy percent of people in Tower Hamlets felt that the borough is a place where people of different backgrounds get on well together<sup>5</sup>. However there were factors which some participants in the RBES consultation felt contributed to fear and could lead to people being treated without dignity or respect as a result of their religion or belief. Many participants highlighted the detrimental impact of negative press coverage of interfaith relations and incidents of tension between communities.

For newer faith communities access to facilities for worship and social activities was highlighted as a major issue of concern. For some faith communities, including Hindus, a lack of place of worship means that they have to travel out of the borough to worship. For others a lack of resources mean that worship and community activities take place in inadequate buildings. This can lead to health and safety concerns and enforcement action being taken where building regulations are being breached.

#### Objectives:

- Tackle negative portrayal of faith communities and interfaith relations in

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<sup>5</sup> Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey, 2008

- the media to reduce the potential for such coverage to increase tension between communities
- Ensure that faith communities are able to access advice and support about maintaining places of worship as safe and sustainable buildings
  - Ensure that faith communities are able to access advice and support about using and adapting buildings for use as places of worship

### **Capacity to participate in decision-making and have a voice and influence**

The RBES consultation revealed a number of different perspectives on the relationship between faith communities and local public authorities. A number of participants felt that the role of faith communities in decision making should be expanded and support provided to faith communities to play this advocacy and representation role on behalf of members. Others however felt it was important that faith communities maintained their independence from public authorities and that too close a relationship with the Council and other public bodies could compromise their ability to play an active role in civil society.

A number of participants suggested that the role of faith communities within local decision making structures should be clarified to ensure that representatives are encouraged to reflect the interests not only of their own faith community but of the wider faith communities of the borough. For example the faith community representatives on the Tower Hamlets Partnership should be accountable not only to their own faith communities also to the wider Interfaith Forum, which is open to people of all faiths or none interested in interfaith activity and dialogue.

Objectives:

- Enable faith communities to work together to have a voice within local decision making structures, including the Tower Hamlets Partnership

## ***A PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY***

### **Capacity to have the skills to participate in society**

Throughout the consultation for the RBES, participants identified opportunities for learning about the range of cultures and beliefs of people in the borough as a key priority. Schools and workplaces were identified as spaces where people of different faiths and backgrounds met and learnt about one another. Interfaith activities, including meetings of the borough's Interfaith Forum and events such as the annual interfaith service to mark Holocaust Memorial Day, were also described in positive terms.

The consultation also suggested that opportunities for interfaith dialogue and contact need to be extended to ensure that people are able to take part in these activities. Particular points raised included:

- The need to develop opportunities for contact between faith communities and people with non-religious beliefs or no belief.

- The need to provide spaces for people who don't speak English to take part in interfaith activities
- The need include an interfaith dimension in work with those perpetrating faith hate crime and violent extremism.

Consultation with staff within the Council suggested that activities designed to increase understanding of faith communities and religious belief should not focus on one religion or faith, but give information about the variety of faith communities in the borough. This would avoid any implication that one faith community is being favoured over another and support the Council's aim to increase interfaith understanding and relationships between people.

Objectives:

- Increase opportunities for involvement of people with no or non-religious belief in faith and interfaith activities
- Extend interfaith dimension of work with perpetrators of faith hate and violent extremism
- Support the development of interfaith activities which engage people who don't speak English
- Ensure that faith awareness activities funded by the Council are presented within an interfaith context to ensure that they contribute to better understanding and relations between people of different backgrounds in the borough

## **Capacity to take part in productive and valued activities**

### Worklessness

In Tower Hamlets we have the second highest level of economically inactive working age women in the country, at forty nine percent. The Greater London Authority has published research showing that across the capital Muslim people are almost twice as likely to be economically inactive compared to the average. Of the economically inactive group, Muslim people are more likely to be looking after a family or be studying than other groups<sup>6</sup>.

There is significant evidence to indicate that Muslim women are particularly likely to be economically inactive and experience multiple barriers to accessing paid employment. In 2006 the Equal Opportunities Commission published research into the experiences of Muslim women in the workplace, which drew on interviews with women in Tower Hamlets<sup>7</sup>. The report concluded that Muslim women experience numerous barriers in entering and progressing in the labour market and this amounts to an area of significant inequality. The Tower Hamlets Employment Strategy sets out a framework to tackle some of these complex issues of employment and worklessness within the borough.

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<sup>6</sup> 'Key Facts for Diverse Communities: Ethnicity and Faith', Greater London Authority, (2007)

<sup>7</sup> 'Moving on Up: Workplace Cultures Report', Equal Opportunities Commission, (2007)

### Volunteering and charitable work

Levels of volunteering and charity work in Tower Hamlets are high. Faith-based community groups and voluntary organisations make up a significant proportion of these groups. In addition a significant proportion of people with religious belief in the borough give time and money to support the management of places of worship and faith related activities. For example, local residents are members of mosque management committees, stand as governors at faith schools in the borough and run voluntary activities such as Sunday schools. A report on mosques in the borough, published in 2008, identified worshipper donations as the major source of income for all mosques in the borough<sup>8</sup>.

Objectives:

- Reduce levels of economic inactivity among Muslim women in the borough through reducing barriers to employment

## ***A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE***

**Capacity to enjoy a comfortable standard of living, with independence and security**

### **Housing**

In the borough the demand for social housing suitable for families far exceeds the available supply. The impact of this on communities is significant, with large numbers of families living in inadequate and poor quality housing. London-wide research by the Greater London Authority indicates that, due to the above average family size, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh families are more likely to live in overcrowded housing. Overcrowding can have adverse effects on health, educational achievement and indirectly lead to increased fear and experience of crime and anti-social behaviour. Local research undertaken with the cooperation of the borough's Council of Mosques in 2008 identified a shortage of suitable housing as the primary issue of concern to local Imams and mosque management committee members<sup>9</sup>.

Objectives:

- Address shortage of suitable social housing which has a disproportionate effect on Muslim families

## ***A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY***

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<sup>8</sup> 'A window of opportunity: Developing a better understanding of the Muslim community in Tower Hamlets', Agroni Research (2008)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

### **Physical security**

Crimes which are reported to the Police "where anyone, including the victim, believes the victim has been targeted because of their actual or perceived religion or belief" are recorded as faith hate crimes. In addition, incidents of anti-social behaviour reported to the Council which do not constitute criminal offences but cause alarm, distress or harassment, or where anyone believes the victim has been targeted because of their actual or perceived religion or belief, are recorded as faith hate incidents.

Local research has shown that victims of faith hate crime and incidents are more likely to be repeat victims than other victims of crime<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, they often experience feelings of not being able to escape the reason they are victimised, and that people may question the seriousness of the offence or incident.

There were five faith hate crimes in Tower Hamlets reported to the Police in 2007; in 2008 this increased to fourteen and increases were identified around religious festivals and incidents of international tension. However there is evidence of significant under reporting of faith hate crime in the borough and actual figures are likely to be much higher. There is a complex relationship between race and faith hate, with evidence suggesting that offenders may be driven by religious intolerance but display this intolerance in racist language, as opposed to identifying a specific faith. In general people seem to be more comfortable reporting race as opposed to faith hate crime.

Qualitative research carried out by the Council's Community Safety service in 2007 suggested that significant numbers of faith hate incidents go unreported. For example, at focus groups female Muslim participants described almost daily faith-related abuse and intimidation and young women reported repeated experiences of faith-related intolerance including having hijabs pulled off, verbal abuse and damage to personal property<sup>11</sup>.

A review of reported faith hate crimes suggests that individuals, buildings and events are the most frequent targets and crimes include criminal damage, assault and actual bodily harm.

There are several factors which affect the vulnerability of people of faith and faith communities to hate crime.

### **Location**

Many places of worship are identifiable as such and are therefore at risk of faith hate attacks. In the past this has included graffiti and desecration of religious symbols or artefacts. Furthermore many of these buildings are historic and making changes to improve security is both costly and may threaten the

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<sup>10</sup> 'Faith Hate Crime Workshop Report', Tower Hamlets Community Safety Service (2007)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



character of the original building. Many of the borough's Anglican churches also have churchyards which are publicly accessible open spaces in which incidents of anti-social behaviour and vandalism have been reported both to the Police, Council and Interfaith Forum.

### **Visibility**

Religious dress also appears to increase vulnerability to hate crime. A 2007 report on hate crime in the borough highlighted experiences of harassment and intimidation of Muslim women who wore the hijab or niqaab; Christian clergy wearing clerical dress as well as Rabbis walking in and out of synagogues and people collecting for religious charities<sup>12</sup>.

### Objectives:

- Improve the security of places of worship to reduce vandalism and risk of faith hate incidents in and around places of worship
- Improve security arrangements for religious festivals and events to reduce incidents of faith hate
- Undertake targeted work to increase reporting of faith hate

## ***A HEALTHY COMMUNITY***

### **The capacity to be healthy**

Access to sports facilities and activities was a key issue identified by faith communities through the consultation for the RBES. There were two key concerns raised:

- 1 **Timing of sports and leisure activities** has an impact on faith communities with some activities only being available during holy days or times, for example Sunday mornings for Christian communities, Friday lunchtimes for Muslim residents and on Saturdays for Jewish people.
- 2 **Provision of gender specific activities and facilities** enables Muslim women who do not want to take part in mixed-gender sporting activities to get involved in sports activities. However while there are facilities providing some gender specific activities in the borough, these are limited due to a lack of trained female sports staff to supervise these activities.

### **Support services**

Faith communities play a significant role in providing support services for individuals and communities to promote wellbeing and provide support to those experiencing hardship and crisis. During the consultation for the RBES we came across numerous examples of faith communities providing support to vulnerable people, including those with mental health conditions, older people, drug users and the homeless. This support is provided in a variety of ways, from informal voluntary activities such as befriending to services provided by faith based

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<sup>12</sup> 'Faith Hate Crime Workshop Report', Tower Hamlets Community Safety Service (2007)

organisations on behalf of and funded by public authorities.

There was also significant variation in who activities were intended to benefit, with some groups offering support principally to members of their own faith community, whilst others set out to meet needs of local people of all faiths and none. The diversity of the population in Tower Hamlets and the history of changing communities has led many faith communities to reach beyond their immediate memberships and respond creatively to the needs of the communities around them.

Responses to the RBES consultation revealed a wide variety of opinions and perceptions about the attitudes of the Council and other public bodies to working with and funding faith based organisations. This wide spectrum of views about the way in which the Council should engage with faith communities and people of faith is matched by a variety of opinions about the adequacy of Council resourcing of faith communities and the relationship between the public, private and social roles of faith communities and organisations.

Objectives:

- Increase availability of women-only activities at local sport and leisure centres
- Ensure that services providing sports, leisure and recreational activities address the potential for people of religious beliefs to have restricted access to activities held at specific times
- Review procurement framework to ensure that funding based organisations are provided with clear information about the parameters and requirements of funding streams and are supported to comply with the Council's Valuing Diversity policy

## **Promoting religion / belief equality as an employer**

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Internal consultation with Council staff revealed a variety of opinions about the way in which religion/belief should be regarded in the workplace. There was a strong feeling that the workplace played an important role in bringing people of different backgrounds together to build positive relationships and many people stated their willingness to help colleagues to understand their religion or belief. However participants also identified some factors which they felt had a detrimental affect on their ability to be open about their own religion or belief in the workplace which included: world events which lead to a negative portrayal of certain faith communities in the media; the use of language which is offensive to some faith communities in the workplace and; a feeling that some faith groups got more publicity and resources than others.

There was significant support for more interfaith events in the Council as these provided opportunities for staff to learn about the variety of religions/beliefs in the borough in a well managed and safe environment.

The information below describes the representation of people of specific religion/beliefs employed by the Council in 2007. It should be noted that this data has only been collected since 2006 and there are significant gaps in the information. We have no data on the religion/belief of twenty six percent of staff and a further ten percent declined to provide the information when asked. Expanding our understanding of the profile of religion/belief among staff is a key commitment in this Scheme.

Religion	Number and (%) of staff in each pay band					Total number of staff
	Less £20,000	£20-39,000	£40-59,000	£60-79,000	£80,000+	
Buddhist	8	19	5	0	0	32
Christian	457 (28)	1083 (34)	171 (34)	12 (29)	10 (30)	1733
Hindu	13	45	5	1	0	64
Jewish	5	19	3	0	1	28
Muslim	211 (13)	487 (15)	39 (8)	2 (5)	1 (3)	740
Sikh	5	26	2	0	0	33
None	87 (5)	327 (10)	125 (25)	17 (41)	12 (36)	568
Other	59	160	22	0	0	241
Decline to state	72 (4)	376 (12)	62 (13)	4 (9)	3 (9)	517
No data	711 (44)	613 (19)	59 (12)	5 (12)	6 (20)	1394
<b>Total</b>	<b>1628</b>	<b>3155</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>5350</b>

In terms of overall representation, the proportion of Christians and Muslims in the workforce is similar to the proportion in the local working age population. The proportion of people of no belief however is lower at ten percent than the

comparable borough figure of eighteen percent. The figures relating to other faith groups are too small to draw conclusive comparisons. If we analyse representation at various pay grades however, the picture is different. The proportion of Christian staff remains fairly consistent at all grades at between 28-34%. Muslim staff, by contrast are more likely to have jobs falling in the less than £20,000 and £20-29,000 pay bands, with proportionately fewer Muslim staff having jobs in the top three pay bands, at 8%, 5% and 3% respectively. The reverse appears to be true of people of no belief who make up just five percent of staff in the lowest pay band, increasing to 10%, 25%, 41% and 36% of staff in the higher pay bands.

Objectives:

- Ensure awareness amongst staff of facilities for reflection and prayer are accessible to all staff of religious and non-religious belief
- Strengthen interfaith understanding between staff and involve staff of all religions and none in relevant decision making and policy development
- Develop a dress code policy for Council staff which incorporates clear guidance to ensure that decisions about dress do not lead to direct or indirect discrimination of individuals based on religion or belief
- Address evidence of inequality or disadvantage experienced by staff as a result of their religion/belief
- Develop the ability of staff working with vulnerable people to understand and assess religion/belief related needs and preferences

## Delivering the Religion/Belief Equality Scheme objectives, 2009-12

Priority	Objective	Action	By whom	By when
<b>ONE TOWER HAMLETS</b>				
To participate in decision making and have a voice and influence	Enable faith communities to work together to have a voice within local decision making	Develop the role of the Interfaith Forum as a key network for engaging with faith communities at all level of the THP with model agreed by April 09 and implemented by March 2010	Participation and Engagement Team, Communities, Localities and Culture	April 2009
		Ensure that processes for consulting and engaging young people actively engage people of different faith and that this is monitored.	Youth Services, Children's Services	December 2010
To be and express yourself and have self-respect	Ensure faith communities are able to access advice and support about using and adapting buildings for use as places of worship	Production of guidance for faith communities on Development and Building Control regulations and advice as part of overall review of planning guidance notes	Conservation and Design Team, D&R	September 2009
		Work with English Heritage to develop a Support Officer project to assist historic places of worship to maintain their buildings in a safe and accessible condition	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's	March 2010
		Produce guidance on use of Council managed and owned community facilities by	Conservation and Design Team, D&R Asset management	December 2009

	faith-related groups to encourage increased sharing of space by faith and community groups	Team, D&R	
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**A PROSPEROUS COMMUNITY**

To engage in productive and valued activities	Reduce levels of economic inactivity among Muslim women in the borough through reducing barriers to employment	Consider the Evidence base. Research the barriers that women face gaining access to employment to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons and develop strategies for addressing need	Access to Employment and Diversity and Equality Team, D&R	March 2010
	Recognise major religious festivals of the boroughs faith communities and ensure publicity enhances interfaith understanding	Produce a corporate calendar of major religious festivals and ensure that these are recognised both in the Council's internal communication channels and in East End Life	Diversity and Equality Team Communications Team, Chief Executive's	September 2009
	Tackle negative portrayal of faith communities and interfaith relations in the media to reduce the potential for such coverage to increase community tension	Include Communications on Community Cohesion Contingency Planning and Tension Monitoring Group meeting agendas and ensure actions are included to respond to all negative coverage	Diversity and Equality Team Communications Team, Chief Executive's	April 2009

**A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE**

To enjoy a comfortable standard of living, with independence and security	Address the shortage of social housing suitable for families	Raise issue with RSLs through the Housing Forum and review as part of Housing Strategy and Lettings Policy and Service review	Housing Strategy Team, D&R	March 2010
		Visit 200 overcrowded households across LB Tower Hamlets, advise them on the bidding		March 2010

		process and housing options available to them. Monitor outcomes by E&D strands		
To have skills to participate in society	Lack of opportunities for people with non-religious beliefs to take part in interfaith and valuing diversity activities	Develop programme for engagement of people of non-religious beliefs in Interfaith Forum activities	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's	March 2010
	Extend interfaith dimension of work with perpetrators of faith hate and violent extremism	Incorporate interfaith activities within the projects funded through the Preventing Violent Extremism programme	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's	June 2009
		Develop mechanisms for involving faith leaders in Restorative Justice activities	Community Safety Service, Communities, Localities and Culture	December 2010
	Support development of interfaith activities which engage people who don't speak English	Develop programme for engagement of people of who do not speak English in Interfaith Forum activities	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's	March 2010
	Ensure that faith awareness activities funded by the Council are presented within an interfaith context to ensure that they contribute to better understanding and	Interfaith Week events to recognise the variety of faiths within the borough and include specific information about the variety of religions/beliefs in the borough	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's	November 2009
		Produce guidance for Religion/Belief awareness events to ensure that they support	Diversity and Equality Team,	November 2009

	relations between people of different backgrounds	the Council's overarching commitment to Valuing Diversity and creating an inclusive workplace	Chief Executive's	
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**A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY**

To live in physical security	Improve the security of places of worship to reduce vandalism and the risk of faith hate incidents of faith hate	Forward plan of religious festival events be developed and monitored by Community Cohesion Contingency Planning and Tension Monitoring Group and organising groups offered assistance to undertake effective risk assessments and put in place proportionate measures	Diversity & Equality Team, Chief Executive's and Tower Hamlets Police Events Office	September 2009
	Improve the security of places of worship to reduce vandalism and risk of faith hate incidents	Churchyard Security Working Group to oversee security improvements to all churchyards	Diversity and Equality Team Community Safety Service, Communities, Localities and Culture	April 2009
	Ensure victims of reported faith hate are supported and increase awareness of reporting mechanisms	To maintain and develop the Third Party Reporting Project to increase reporting of hate incidents and foster effective joint working amongst partner agencies involved where 100% of Third Party Reports monitored and actioned (baseline of 18).  Implement recommendations from Hate	Crime Policy & Partnership Team, Community Safety Service, Communities, Localities and Culture	March 2010 and annual update



		<p>Crime Victim's Needs Research Report for increased satisfaction with services by victims of hate crime measured through satisfaction questionnaires.</p> <p>Awareness campaign promoting clear messages that Tower Hamlets is No Place for Hate including Homophobic Hate – 100% increase in sign up to NPFH Pledge (baseline of 50), 24 outreach activities (including faith communities and events) and Evaluation Report.</p> <p>To work with partners to ensure 100% of identified perpetrators of faith hate incidents reported to the Council are actioned.</p> <p>Hate Incidents Panel - Coordination of multi-agency panel which ensures a coordinated response to all faith hate incidents reported to Council.</p> <p>To work with partners in ensuring faith hate incidents are recorded effectively.</p> <p>Act on the consultation that has taken place with local faith communities to inform the multi agency response and support strategies</p>		
	<p>Work with faith communities to ensure that young people are protected from the risk of sexual exploitation</p>		<p>Service Manager, Child Protection and Reviewing, Children's Services</p>	<p>March 2010</p>

**A HEALTHY COMMUNITY**

To be healthy	<p>Increase availability of women-only activities at local sport and leisure centres</p> <p>Ensure that services providing sports, leisure and recreational activities address the potential for people of religious beliefs to have restricted access to activities held at specific times</p> <p>Support faith based organisations to work within a partnership framework to provide services that meet the needs of local people and support the Council's Valuing Diversity policy</p>	<p>Programme as part of Healthy Towns to provide women &amp; girls swimming programme commencing April 2009 -2011</p> <p>Production of Guidance on Reasonable Adjustments in relation to Religion and Belief to include information on considerations relating to timing of activities</p> <p>Developing a guide for youth workers on how to enable young people to engage with different faiths and cultures</p> <p>Review procurement framework to ensure that funding based organisations are provided with clear information about the parameters and requirements of funding streams and are supported to comply with the Council's Valuing Diversity policy</p>	<p>Sports Development Team, Cultural Services, Communities, Localities and Culture</p> <p>Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's</p> <p>Youth Service, Children's Services</p> <p>Corporate Procurement Team, Resources</p>	<p>March 2010</p> <p>April 2009</p> <p>March 2010</p> <p>March 2010</p>
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<b>AS AN EMPLOYER</b>			
Workforce to Reflect the Community	Ensure awareness amongst staff of facilities for reflection and prayer are accessible to all staff of religious and non-religious belief	Remind managers and staff of the availability of prayer rooms and there location in Council buildings.	Corporate HR, Resources September 2009
	Strengthen interfaith understanding between staff and involve staff of all religions and none in relevant decision making and policy development	Establish an interfaith staff forum to act as a reference group for consultation on prayer/reflection space and interfaith events	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's March 2010
	Address evidence of inequality or disadvantage experienced by staff as a result of their religion/belief	Monitor key human resources performance indicators and workforce profile in terms of the religion/belief profile of people involved on an annual basis	Corporate HR, Resources From April 2009
		Promote to all staff a firm commitment to providing support when they experience faith related prejudice or difficulties with clients, customers or services users	March 2010
Develop the ability of staff working with vulnerable people to understand and assess religion/belief related	Develop a dress code policy for Council staff which incorporates clear guidance to ensure that decisions about dress do not lead to direct or indirect discrimination of individuals based on religion or belief	Corporate HR, Resources March 2010	
		RBES Reasonable Adjustments on the grounds of religion/belief guidance	Diversity and Equality Team, Chief Executive's April 2009

| needs and preferences