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Sent: 21 April 2011 13:34

To: Specific Duties

Subject: FEEDBACK ON SPECIFIC DUTIES CONSULTATION FROM WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Please find response below:

Response to Specific Duties – Policy review

The revised duties are welcomed overall for the greater freedom they allow public bodies, such as Watford Borough Council, in developing and delivering an approach to ensuring they meet the general equality duty in a way that is appropriate to their local community and community needs. The council sees the revised specific duties as a way of focusing on what is really important to local people – moving away from an approach that was often in danger of being process driven to one that engages and involves people in a way that is meaningful and driven by outcomes that make a real difference. The council will continue to take equalities into account in its decision-making because it wants to ensure it meets the needs of its diverse community.

For Watford, the most important part of the future approach will be the empowerment of local people to challenge decisions, which is something that the council already actively encourages.

However, there are real concerns both from the council and our community about how this challenge can be facilitated openly and fairly. Not all members of a community are as able or empowered to challenge – and this should be particularly recognised when considered in terms of deciding on an approach to the delivery of equalities. Identifying ‘the public’ as those with the role of holding a public body to account presumes that everyone in a community has the same abilities, access to information and confidence to challenge. We know this is not always the case and that there is a danger that more vulnerable, less well organised or articulate groups are not able to exert the same degree of influence. Watford BC can, and will, take steps to be as fair and inclusive as it can but the risk at a national level needs to be recognised and addressed.

Regards

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