



Guidelines on Cultural Diversity

1. Introduction

URH and its partner RMOs are constantly striving to make life better for all of our tenants and leaseholders. We serve a diverse set of communities and recognise that different people will have different needs. We aim to provide services in a way that responds to those needs. One of our basic principles is that everyone should have fair and equal access to our services.

Under the Race Relations Act as amended, URH and the RMOs have a general duty to promote race equality. We should work to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good race relations. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires the Council to publish a Race Equality Scheme which outlines how it will review its functions, policies and proposed policies in order to meet the general duty. URH will look to adopt the Council's Equality Scheme

Over 130 languages are spoken in the borough. The main languages spoken by students in Lambeth other than English are Yoruba and Portuguese. Over 67% of the population in the borough have some form of stated religious affiliation. After Christianity (59 per cent), Islam has the second largest proportion of followers in the borough (5.4 per cent), followed by the Hindu faith (1.3 per cent).

It is important that everyone who works for us is aware of this and is prepared to respect these differences and deal sensitively with them.

URH has no political or religious affiliations and staff are expected to reflect this by not trying to promote their personal beliefs with residents. By the same token, URH will not tolerate harassment of any kind against its staff. Anyone who feels they have been the victim of harassment or bullying or who feels they have not been treated with respect should speak to their line manager about the case.

This is not a book of rules. This guidance will help you when dealing with people whose cultural background is different from your own. The basic rule of thumb is:

- Don't stereotype people and do remember that everyone is an individual.
- What is acceptable or unacceptable to them will depend on how old they are and where they have grown up as well as their cultural or religious background.

So take your cue from the other person's behaviour and if in doubt ask politely for guidance. People are unlikely to be offended that you don't know.

We want to keep these guidelines up to date and relevant. If you have any suggestions for improvements or additions, please contact the URH Chief Executive.

2. Clothing

URH's dress code is that staff should always appear professional. This means that clothes should be clean and not scruffy. Casual clothing is often the most appropriate but this will depend on the purpose of the visit and the impression the member of staff wants to make.

- In some cultures (particularly Muslim households) it is expected that you will remove your shoes before you enter the house. If you are unhappy about taking your shoes off, you can get shoe covers (speak to your line manager).

- In many cultures, both men and women are offended by clothing that is revealing. Most staff would probably not consider wearing shorts, short skirts or low-cut tops. However, some residents will feel uncomfortable if they can see a woman's upper arms or knees. You should bear this in mind and perhaps carry a light-weight jacket to slip on if necessary.

There is no way we can tell residents what they should wear when we visit but staff should use their judgement. If for example, a resident answers the door in a bath towel, you could offer to come back at a more convenient time or wait outside while they get dressed.

3. Gender

It is possible that for cultural or personal reasons some men may not wish to be visited by a woman and that some women may not wish to be visited by a man.

- It would be helpful when making an appointment to let the resident know the gender of the visitor and whether they plan to come alone. This gives an opportunity to check that the resident is comfortable about this.
- If a female resident does not wish a male to visit while she is alone, for example, arrangements can be made for the visit to take place when there are other people at home.
- If a male resident does not want to deal with a female member of staff, it can be stressed that this is the only person available to help them. It will then be up to the member of staff to build a relationship with that resident and develop credibility through her professionalism.

4. Shaking hands, touching

It would not normally be appropriate for a member of staff to touch a resident except perhaps to shake hands.

However, in some cultures it would be considered disrespectful for a man to shake hands with a woman. In others it would be extremely rude to shake hands with a visitor every time they call. The length of time that a handshake goes on can also vary from culture to culture.

- The best guidance would be to take your cue from the other person and mirror their behaviour. If a hand is offered you should take it.

5. Hospitality

It is not uncommon for a resident to offer hospitality in the form of food or drink. In some cases this is an important part of the professional relationship. In others, the member of staff may not think it is appropriate or desirable. In this case, it is important not to give offence by a refusal.

- If you do not wish to accept a drink or food, it is better to make an excuse, perhaps saying that you have just eaten or had a cup of tea.

Accepting a drink you do not want and then leaving it or trying to dispose of it could be embarrassing for you and insulting for the resident.

- The URH staff handbook makes it clear that business gifts other than items below a set value should not be accepted. Staff should be clear that accepting gifts or gratuities could be considered as gross misconduct. In some cultures, the acceptance of a gift may build an expectation that the giver will get preferential treatment. It is important, therefore, that while showing pleasure at the gift the member of staff politely declines the gift unless it is of a low value. In such a case you should make it clear that the benefit will be shared, perhaps with other team members.

6. Festivals and timings

A **calendar** of the main festivals and holidays of different religions is provided at the back.

It is also important to be sensitive to the timing of your visits during the day and week.

- The Muslim holy day, Friday, falls within the normal working week and so Muslims may wish to avoid appointments and visits. It is important to check this when planning appointments.
- Some religions are governed by lunar months and sunrise and sunset. The Jewish Sabbath, for example, begins at sundown on a Friday. During the winter months this likely to fall within the working day and this should be borne in mind when planning visits.
- In Islam, there are fixed prayer times throughout the day. These are signalled by the call to prayer from the mosque. Three of the fixed prayer times fall in the normal working day – at noon, mid-way between noon and sunset and at sunset. It is important to bear in mind when making an appointment that a resident may need to pray during the normal working day.

7. Names

Not everyone identifies themselves by their surname or family name and confusion can arise. You should always ask the resident what their family name and most commonly used given name is at the time of signup. The following information is intended to alert you to possible understandings.

- A Muslim may have several personal or religious names and sometimes also a family name. If there is no family name, you will need to establish the main personal name.
- A Hindu man is likely to have a personal name, then a variation of their father's personal name followed by a family name. Women usually only have personal and family names.
- Some people do not like to be addressed informally by their own given name but prefer to be addressed as Mr, Mrs or Miss. It is best to check this at sign-up to avoid inadvertently giving offence.

8. Communicating

If a resident does not speak English it would not be appropriate to get them to sign a document or make a commitment without interpreter support. However, it is important not to resort to using residents' children or neighbours to interpret. Not only is it potentially embarrassing for the resident, it also breaches confidentiality and accurate communication is not guaranteed. Using children also undermines the normal power dynamics and can cause problems in the parent-child relationship. Contact details and guidelines for working with interpreters are available.

- Remember when using an interpreter to talk to the resident and not the interpreter!
- In some communities it is not unusual for women to avoid making eye contact with men. This is a sign of respect but it could be misinterpreted especially if the resident's language skills are not good.
- It is important to be aware if you are visiting the home of a resident who has a disability and to check that you are prepared to deal with any special communication needs they may have.
- If you are visiting a resident with support needs it is best to check with the scheme officers so that you are properly prepared to meet their communication needs.
- Hand gestures are not universal and a friendly gesture in one culture can be offensive in another.

Clothing

Hindus

While Hindu men often wear western dress, narrow or baggy trousers (usually white) with a long shirt or tunic may also be worn

Hindu women often wear a sari over a petticoat and blouse. Many women also wear a shalwar kameez (loose trousers and tunic), a form of dress favoured by Punjabi women and the younger generation.

Married Hindu women tend to wear a red spot (bindi) on their forehead. Bindis are now worn in many designs and colours that match the dress. An older woman wearing a white sari or shalwar kameez may be a widow.

Jews

While most Jews wear western dress, devout men tend to keep their head covered at all times, either with a skullcap or a hat. Orthodox male Jews, mainly of the Hasidic tradition, wear dark clothes, wide brimmed hats, long coats, beards and side locks, and are thus quite distinctive.

Orthodox married women, in particular, are subject to traditional dress regulations and may not wear sleeveless garments or trousers. Such women tend to cover their hair at all times often with a wig.

Muslims/Islam

Most Muslim men wear western dress, although some wear a form of religious dress or other marker of their religious identity. Men frequently wear a skullcap. Middle Eastern males might wear full Arab dress, and Pakistani and Afghani males, in particular, may wear the traditional local shalwar kameez, baggy trousers with a tunic often combined with particular styles of waistcoat or a western-style suit.

Muslim women in England tend to wear dresses that reflect the customs of their country of origin. For women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh this may be a shalwar kameez or specially tailored long dress worn over matching trousers (a distinctive dress worn by many Gujarati Muslim women and also saris (mainly Bengali women). Middle Eastern and Iranian women will often wear black cloaks that cover the entire body. Women from other countries will wear modest dress in local or western style cut to be neither tight nor revealing. Most Muslim women wear a head covering (hijab), which may be a veil or headscarf, which covers the head and the neck.

Sikhs

For devout/baptised Sikhs uncut hair (kesh) is a key element of their religion. Some Sikh men cut their hair, do not wear a turban and wear western style clothes: others wear western clothes and a turban, or a turban with the traditional dress (ofpyjam-kurta) long shirt and tight or baggy cotton trousers.

Sikh women normally wear a shalwar kameez or sari and often cover their heads with a long scarf (chunni) of any colour

Important Religious Festivals
April 2008 – March 2009
(The following list is not meant to be complete)

April 2008	6 th	Hindu – Bikarami Samvat - Varsha-Pratipada The Hindu Spring New Year celebrated particularly in South India. Diwali, another Hindu New Year, is the more popular in the UK
	13 th	Sikh – Vaisakhi The Sikh New Year Festival, which also commemorates the founding of the Khalsa by the tenth Guru (Guru Gobind Singh) in 1699. Also spelled Baisakhi
	14 th	Sikh – Birthday of Guru Nanak (Nanakshahi calendar) The founder of the Sikh religion was born on 14 April 1469. This festival is also currently celebrated according to the Lunar Calendar, but this may change
	20 th	Jewish – The start of the season of Passover when Jews commemorate the liberation of the Children of Israel who were led out of Egypt by Moses
May	1 st	Christian – Ascension Day marks the last earthly appearance of Christ after his resurrection. Christians believe Christ ascended into heaven. It is celebrated 40 days after Easter. The Roman Catholic church celebrates this festival on the following Sunday (4 th)
	20 th	Buddhism - Wesak or Buddha day. The most important of the Buddhist festivals. It celebrates the Buddha's birthday, and, for some Buddhists, also marks his birth and death
July	20 th	Jewish – 17th Tammuz. An important Jewish fast day
	23 rd	Rastafari – Birthday of Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie was the Emperor of Ethiopia. Rastas believe Haile Selassie is God, and that he will return to Africa members of the black community who are living in exile
August	24 th	Hindu – Janmashtami - Krishna Jayanti. The Janamashtami festival marks the birth of Krishna, the most highly venerated God in the Hindu pantheon
September	2 nd	Muslim – Ramadan (start). Ramadan is the Muslim month of fasting
	30 th	Jewish – Rosh Hashanah. Jewish New Year
October	1 st	Muslim – Eid-UI-Fitr. The end of Ramadan when Muslims celebrate the end of fasting and thank Allah for His help with their month-long act of self-control
	9 th	Jewish – Yom Kippur. Day of Atonement - the most solemn day of the Jewish year
	28 th	Hindu – Diwali. The festival of lights is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia. It is an occasion for celebrations by Hindus as well as Jains and Sikhs

November	1 st	Christian – All Saints' Day. All Saints' Day (also known as All Hallows' Day or Halloween) is when Anglicans and Roman Catholics honour all saints, known and unknown, of the Christian church. Orthodox churches celebrate it on the first Sunday after Pentecost
December	8 th	Muslim – Hajj (start). The annual pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims should complete at least once in their lifetime
	25 th	Christian – Christmas Day. The day when Western Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ
	29 th	Muslim – Al-Hijira. Islamic New Year. Marks the migration of the Prophet Mohammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina
January 2009	6 th	Christian – Epiphany. Celebrates the visit of the wise men (the magi) to the infant Jesus. In the East, where it originated, the Epiphany celebrates the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan
	14 th	Hindu – Makar Sankrant. Makar Sankrant is one of the most important festivals of the Hindu calendar and celebrates the sun's journey into the northern hemisphere
	27 th	Jewish/multifaith – National Holocaust Memorial Day. The UK Holocaust Memorial Day was first held in January 2001. The date was chosen as the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.
February	25 th	Christian – Ash Wednesday. The first day of Lent for Western Christian churches. Lent is the season marking the time Jesus spent in the wilderness