

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder and Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Equality and Diversity 18 January 2012
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Corporate Manager, Community & Customer Services

QUARTERLY EQUALITIES UPDATE (Q3 2011/12)

Purpose

1. To provide the Portfolio Holder with a quarterly update on equalities from October to December 2011.
2. This is not a key decision because the quarterly update is for information only and was first published in the January 2011 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. The Portfolio Holder is requested to note the contents of this report and in particular the update on the Council's requirement to publish Equality Information by 31st January 2012 in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (attached).

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The contents of this report is for information only.

Background

5. As an authority we are committed to eliminating discrimination and prejudice, and developing a culture which values difference, both in employment and service delivery, which is reflected in the updated version of the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 –2012.
6. The Council was subject to a Diversity Peer Challenge on 13 and 14 October 2010 and successfully attained **Achieving** status on the Equalities Framework for Local Government. The Council will now focus on equality mapping, which will help us to develop an understanding of our community, including the extent of inequality and disadvantage across the district. We will continue to use Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) to review all major corporate and service changes in policy and service delivery.
7. The Equality Act 2010 came into effect on 01 October 2010 and brings together, harmonises and extends current equality law. The existing anti-discrimination laws have been consolidated into a single Act, which has been introduced to strengthen the laws preventing discrimination and the inequalities that still exist in society today. The Council will now prepare, consult on and adopt a Single Equalities Scheme in response to the new Equality Act.

Considerations

Comprehensive Equalities Policy (CEP)

8. An essential part of the Equalities Framework for Local Government is for the authority to express its commitment to equality and diversity through the development

of a CEP. The Portfolio Holder endorsed an updated version of the CEP at his meeting on 21 July 2010 to take account of changes in terminology, up-to-date statistical information, reference to the new Equality Act 2010 and new commitments for the CEP, including the development of a Single Equality Scheme in 2011/12. Further updates to the CEP will be required due to the requirements of the new Public Sector Equality Duty.

Public Sector Equality Duty

9. The purpose of the public sector equality duty is to mainstream the consideration of equality and good relations into the business planning and decision making of the Council. The general equality duty requires the Council to consider (have due regard to) how we positively advance equality and good relations; and ensures that this consideration is reflected in the design and delivery of services and policies. The purpose of the specific equality duties is to help us comply with the general equality duty.
10. Following consultation, the general equality duty came into force on 5 April 2011, followed by specific duties regulations, which were approved in September 2011. The timetable for implementing the particular requirement of the specific duties to publish equality information is as follows:
 - 5 April 2011 General Equality Duty comes into force
 - 10 September Specific Duty comes into force
 - 31 January 2012 Council to publish equality information
 - 6 April 2012 Council to publish equality objectives
11. An update on the Council's requirement to publish equality information by 31st January 2012 is attached to this report. The majority of the information presented will be familiar as this has been taken from the Council's draft Single Equality Scheme, which was considered and endorsed by the Portfolio Holder at an earlier meeting.

Corporate Equalities Action Plan

12. A new Corporate Equalities Action Plan for 2011/12 has been developed, primarily to focus on the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Equality Framework for Local Government

13. The Council's **Achieving** status on the Equalities Framework for Local Government (see paragraph 6 above) is a very important accreditation for the Council and lasts for three years. It will then be necessary to seek re-accreditation at this level prior to October 2013 unless the Council feels ready for a peer challenge at the next level of the Framework - **Excellence**. Interestingly, the Council is able to provide sufficient evidence to more than a third of the baselines relevant to **Excellence** status on the Equality Framework for Local Government. This follows the Council's recent success of attaining corporate Customer Service Excellence in June 2011. The Portfolio Holder will be asked to consider the case for taking the organisation forward to an 'Excellence' assessment at a meeting later in 2012.

Equality and Diversity Steering Group

14. The Equality and Diversity Steering Group was disbanded on 15th September 2011. This was following a decision by the Executive Management Team (EMT) to rationalise internal groups.

15. EMT will now take on a co-ordinating role for performance related issues, therefore replacing the need for separate internal groups. Equality and Diversity issues will now be considered by EMT as part of an 'exception' reports process. This will mean that EMT is advised on any equalities matters that are of concern to the Council or where performance attainment is being affected. EMT will also take the corporate lead on consultation matters.

Member Development Workshops

16. The equalities workshop scheduled for 30th November 2011 was postponed due to an expected low attendance. This will be rescheduled early in 2012. The format of the workshop is to explore the linkage between equalities and local government and the challenges ahead in light of the new Equality Act 2010.

Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs)

17. Following the completion of the initial programme of EQIAs, a new programme is under development for 2012-2013, focussing on new and revised policies, functions, practices and projects. Service areas are still required to review existing EQIAs within prescribed timescales.
18. At a future meeting, the Portfolio Holder will be presented with a progress report on the new EQIA arrangements.

Single Equality Scheme

19. Previously, the Council has adopted separate Disability, Gender and Race Equality Schemes. A new draft Single Equality Scheme has been developed in response to the Equality Act 2010 and would supersede all previously endorsed Equality Schemes; and brings together our objectives across the new nine protected characteristics and the characteristic unique to South Cambridgeshire – 'Rurality.'
20. The Council's first single Equality Scheme was out for consultation until 24 June 2011. A further post-consultation draft of the Single Equality Scheme will be presented to the Portfolio Holder at a future meeting.

Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2011

21. The Council has entered the Stonewall Workplace Equality index for the third year running and results will be announced in early 2012.
22. The 2011 index indicated that the Council has moved up to 320th (from 325th), although the Council's overall score had increased by 24 points to 71 out of an available 200 points, which represents a 51% improvement rate on the 2010 index.

Equality and Diversity Awards

23. The Council was presented with the Leading Change in Equality and Diversity award at the annual ceremony hosted by Bedfordshire Race & Equalities Council held on 14th October 2011. This award demonstrates the Council's commitment to Equality and Diversity
24. At the same event, the Council's Equality and Diversity Officer, was highly-commended as runner-up in the individual Equality and Diversity Champion of the Year category.

Equality and Diversity Consultancy

25. The Council's Equality and Diversity Officer is currently supporting Cambridge City Council and Uttlesford District Council on a consultancy basis. This is on a six-month Service level Agreements basis in both cases. This consultancy work has enhanced the Council's reputation and that of the Equality and Diversity Officer; however, his absence, together with the conclusion of funding for the Equality Project Officer post) has meant that internal initiatives such as EQIA monitoring and promotional events have not been prioritised. As described above, the development of a new EQIA programme for 2012-2013 will be taken forward as a priority.

Options

26. None

Implications

27. Financial	All current equalities work is being taken forward from existing budgets.
Legal	The Council has a public responsibility to ensure that it adheres to legislative requirements in relation to equalities, which ensure that our services are open to, and, accessible by all our residents and reflect the diversity of our rural district.
Staffing	The Equality and Diversity Officer is responsible for mainstreaming equalities into the Council with the support of the Executive Management Team and Equalities Consultative Forum.
Risk Management	The Council could be successfully challenged over not complying with general equalities legislation or legislation specific to public and local authority bodies, <i>leading to</i> financial compensation payments and penalties, possible Equality and Human Rights Commission inspection, <i>resulting in</i> reduction in reserves available to support balanced MTFs, adverse publicity and effect on reputation.
Equality and Diversity	The Council is committed to eliminating discrimination and prejudice, and developing a culture which values difference, both in employment and service delivery. Our commitment to equalities is based on the idea of equal life chances. This helps local authorities to develop an equal society for the community, which it serves. A Single Equality Scheme sets out our plans for making equality happen for people living in South Cambridgeshire.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No An EQIA is not required as this report is for information only.
Climate Change	None specific.

Consultations

28. None.

Consultation with Children and Young People

29. None.

Effect on Strategic Aims

30. Equality is an important element of our Strategic Aim to deliver first class services accessible to all and our Value of Mutual Respect.

Conclusions / Summary

31. The Portfolio Holder is requested to note the contents of this report.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 –2012 (Version 2)

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