

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder

21 March 2012

AUTHOR/S: Executive Director, Corporate Services

FINAL SINGLE EQUALITY SCHEME 2012 – 2015

Purpose

1. To request that the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Equality and Diversity comment on, endorse and adopt the new Single Equality Scheme 2012 – 2015 on behalf of the Council.
2. This is a key decision because
 - it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in all wards of the District;
 - it raises new issues of policy, or is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework, or is a decision taken under powers delegated by the Council to amend an aspect of the policy framework;
 - it is of such significance to a locality, the Council or the services which it provides that the decision-taker is of the opinion that it should be treated as a key decision;and it was first published in the November 2010 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. That the Portfolio Holder agrees the new Single Equality Scheme 2012 – 2015 on behalf of the Council. This is to ensure that the Council is fully compliant with the statutory duty set out in Equality Act 2010.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. Previously, the Portfolio Holder has endorsed Disability, Gender and Race Equality Schemes for the Council. A new Single Equality Scheme has been developed in response to the Equality Act 2010, which supersedes all previously endorsed Equality Schemes; and brings together our statutory requirement to publish Equality Objectives by 06 April 2012.

Background

5. 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.
6. The Equality Act has also created changes to earlier legislation and includes discrimination previously unrecognised in legislation. In essence, it creates a new 'Single Equality Duty' on public bodies to tackle discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and encourage good community relations.
7. The term *protected characteristics* has replaced *equality strands* for describing the protected traits held by groups or individuals under anti-discrimination and equality legislation. The earlier separate duties for disability, gender and race have been

replaced with a single, more effective framework and the new 'Single Equality Duty' covers:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

8. On 05 April 2011, further parts of the Equality Act were implemented under the General Duty, which requires local authorities exercising public functions to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization;
- Advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who don't;
- Foster good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't.

Considerations

9. The specific duties support and aid compliance with the General Duty and require local authorities to:

- *Publish information annually to demonstrate how we meet the General Duty starting no later than 31 January 2012. This requirement was met and the Council has published a document entitled ["Equality Information and the Public Sector Equality Duty."](#)*
- *Prepare and publish one or more objectives to meet any of the aims of the General Duty at least every four years starting no later than 06 April 2012. The Council's Equality Objectives that it will be focussing on are detailed in chapter 6 of the Single Equality Scheme. The Equality Objectives have been aligned with the Corporate Plan as agreed by Full Council on 23 February 2012.*

Options

10. The Portfolio Holder may agree, amend or reject the Single Equality Scheme as presented, bearing in mind that the Council has a legal obligation to publish one or more equality objectives by 06 April 2012.

Implications

11. 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	Ongoing as part of the Equality Objectives, which support the Corporate Plan actions. The development and publication of a Single Equality Scheme will help to ensure that decisions affecting the protected traits held by groups or individuals under anti-discrimination and equality legislation are considered and adopted in an appropriate and fair manner. As expected, the Single Equality Scheme will have a positive impact on people.
Climate Change	None specific.

Consultations

12. The Portfolio Holder commented on and endorsed the draft Single Equality Scheme on 19 January 2011.
13. The Single Equality Scheme has been subject to widespread consultation with Council staff, Councillors, local residents, community groups, partner organisations, parish councils and other associations between 1 April 2011 and 24 June 2011. This helped us gather a wide range of views on whether the draft Scheme represented an effective approach to delivering Equality over the next 3 years. Comments received were used to finalise the Scheme for the Council to adopt.
14. Consultation on the Council's long term vision, aims, approaches and actions that have helped shape the equality objectives took place between 06 December 2011 and 20 January 2012.

Consultation with Children and Young People

15. None

Effect on Strategic Aims

16. The new Single Equality Scheme and its associated Equality Objectives have been aligned with Strategic Aims as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.

Conclusions / Summary

17. A new Single Equality Scheme has been developed in response to new legislation, namely the Equality Act 2010 and would supersede all previously endorsed Equality Schemes.

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

Contact Officer: Paul Williams – Equality and Diversity Officer
Telephone: (01954) 713465
E-mail: paul.Williams@scambs.gov.uk