

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

---

**REPORT TO:** Housing Portfolio Holder and Portfolio Holder  
with responsibility for Equality and Diversity

23 January 2013

**AUTHOR/S:** Executive Director, Corporate Services

---

### QUARTERLY EQUALITIES UPDATE (Q3 2012/13)

#### Purpose

1. To provide the Portfolio Holder with a quarterly update on equalities from October to December 2012.
2. This is not a key decision because the quarterly update is for information only and was first published in the June 2012 Forward Plan.

#### Recommendations

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

#### 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. The Council has made great progress in its 'equalities journey' from a low base. We have worked hard to put in place a systematic programme for the completion and review of equality impact assessments within all services, developed new policies and schemes specific to equality and diversity, developed our equality mapping techniques, improved our equalities monitoring and developed consultation structures to allow all sections of the community to scrutinise and challenge performance.

#### Considerations

##### Equality Framework for Local Government

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.
7. The Council's **Achieving** status on the Equalities Framework for Local Government was a significant accreditation recognising our progress, which 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 success of attaining corporate Customer Service Excellence accreditation in June 2011.

8. At its meeting on 24 October 2012, the Executive Management Team considered an interim assessment to inform progress against the **Excellent** level and recommendation for the Council to seek formal accreditation during 2013.
9. The overall findings of the interim assessment identify that the Council is in a strong position to be recognised as an **Excellent** authority on the Equality Framework for Local Government. However, some key areas for improvement have been identified, namely:
  - Harnessing Member intelligence about changing needs of communities;
  - Consistency of engagement across some protected characteristic groups; and
  - Need for a mechanism to assess current satisfaction levels with the working environment.
10. The Executive Management Team supported the recommendation in principle, subject to a more detailed analysis of the likely resource commitment required and greater understanding of the development areas identified and how these could be addressed using existing or new pieces of work. The assessment process will provide a clear focus through which to drive further service improvements, but would need to demonstrate positive outcomes without being an unacceptable burden on the staffing capacity available.
11. The Executive Management Team also designated Stephen Hills, Director of Housing as EMT Equalities Champion to act as Project Sponsor for the future accreditation work and chair project/steering group meetings
12. There is a 16-week lead-in for challenge bookings and documentation will need to be submitted six to eight weeks before the team come onsite. An indicative timescale for completion of the full assessment led by the Equality and Diversity Officer and supported by a project team (re-established Equality and Diversity Steering Group) is from December 2012 to July 2013.
13. The onsite challenge will take place over three days and the peer team will speak to a range of internal and external stakeholders, including partners, community and voluntary organisations, Members and employees to gain supporting information for the level claimed. The team may also visit community projects.

#### Single Equality Scheme 2012 - 2015

14. The Portfolio Holder adopted the new Single Equality Scheme 2012 – 2015 on behalf of the Council at his meeting on 21 March 2012. The Single Equality Scheme can be viewed via the following [link](#).
15. The Equality Objectives as set out in the Single Equality Scheme have been aligned with the Corporate Plan as agreed by Full Council on 23 February 2012. The Equality Objectives are as follows:
  - Improve service design, delivery and access by improving the way we engage with communities, use customers' feedback and develop our knowledge and understanding of our communities.
  - Identify, prioritise and deliver actions, which will narrow the gap in outcomes between disadvantaged groups and the wider community.
  - Foster good relations by promoting greater awareness and understanding between our communities.
16. The Equality Objectives will be reviewed on an annual basis in conjunction with the Corporate Plan review.

#### Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs)

17. The programme of EQIAs for 2012/2013 focuses primarily on the new Corporate Plan and Council Actions. The programme for 2012/2013 will be enhanced further by the corporate forward plan and other relevant forward plans.
18. There was a corporate target in place to complete 40 EQIAs during 2011/2012. Whilst the target was not met, following subsequent analysis we are satisfied that all key service decisions during 2011/2012 have been impact assessed. A quantitative target for EQIA completion was not set during 2012/2013.
19. The EQIA process has been simplified and an initial 'screen' has been developed to determine whether a more detailed EQIA is required and, where it is, to allow services to focus more quickly on the live issues around equality impacts and how these contribute to positive service outcomes. The new process and templates was launched on 14 December 2012 and initial feedback has been very positive.

#### Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme

20. The Council has signed up to the Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme until February 2013. Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme is Britain's good practice forum in which employers can work with Stonewall, and each other, to promote lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the workplace.
21. The Council has entered the Stonewall Workplace Equality index three years running and we have moved up 135 places in 2012 to 185<sup>th</sup> position nationally out of 363 organisations. This is compared to 320<sup>th</sup> in 2011 and 325<sup>th</sup> in 2010.
22. Due to competing resources and time constraints, the Council did not enter a submission for the 2013 Workplace Equality Index. As the focus during 2013/14 will be on the Equality Framework for Local Government, the Executive Management has decided that the Council will discontinue its membership of the Stonewall Diversity Champions programme after February 2013.

#### Equality and Diversity Steering Group

23. The Equality and Diversity Steering Group was disbanded on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2011. This was following a decision by the Executive Management Team to rationalise internal groups.
24. There was a concern that loss of this group has led to the removal of a valued forum for taking forward our equalities agenda such that momentum has been lost. The Executive Management Team has agreed to re-constitute the Equality and Diversity Steering Group to assist with the preparations for accreditation at the **Excellent** level of the Equality Framework for Local Government as detailed in the earlier paragraphs.

#### Equality and Diversity Consultancy

25. The Council's Equality and Diversity Officer still continues to support Cambridge City Council and Uttlesford District Council on a consultancy basis. The current consultancy arrangements are in place until June 2013.

## Equality and Diversity Training for Councillors

26. The Council organised an ‘Embracing Diversity for Councillors’ training event on 29 November 2012. A total of 11 district Councillors attended the event in addition to Councillors from neighbouring authorities and Parish Councils.

### Options

27. None.

### Implications

28.	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. Actively pursuing the <b>Excellent</b> level of the Equality Framework for Local Government would provide further mitigation against the strategic risk (STR02) to a point where the Executive Management Team may wish to review its continuing inclusion on the Strategic Risk Register.
	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.

### Effect on Strategic Aims

29. 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**

30. Equalities work supports the achievement of all the Council's objectives. 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:

Single Equality Scheme 2012 - 2015

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