

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive

13 July 2006

RACE EQUALITY SCHEME: UPDATE

Purpose

1. To finalise the Council's Race Equality Scheme (RES) in the light of progress made in implementing the action plan, consultation responses and recommended practice from the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE).

Effect on Corporate Objectives

2.

Accessible services	The Council's commitment to race equality contributes to the objective on "high quality, accessible, value for money services" and the priority of "improving customer services". This is reinforced by the Local Strategic Partnership's Community Strategy, and the Council's policies on Equality & Diversity and Traveller issues.
Village Life	
Sustainability	
Partnership	

Background

3. The Cabinet and Council in January 2006 agreed the Race Equality Scheme 2005-08 as a draft for consultation. The principles and actions set out in the Scheme have been implemented since then, while the consultation has taken place.

Considerations

4. **Progress made in the last six months:** Of the 60 actions in the Race Equality Scheme which were due to be taken between January – June 2006: 40 (including on-going ones) have been carried out; four are still being taken forward; and two have proved to be no longer appropriate (see paragraph 11b below). This leaves 14 other actions where the timescales have had to be revised in view of post-council tax capping capacity constraints. In this context, however, this represents good progress.
5. There have been three main developments in the last six months.
 - (a) the Traveller Needs Assessment (also known as the Traveller Housing Needs survey) has been completed;
 - (b) the county-wide Traveller Co-ordination Group (involving councils, the police, health service and other partners) has been established;
 - (c) the Council has signed up to the "Diversity in Districts" programme, supported by the Employers' Organisation and the ODPM's capacity building fund. The scheme is aimed at helping councils with a 'fair' CPA rating and a '0' score against the CRE's Equality Standard to improve that score. The programme is 50% subsidised and the Council is receiving specialist consultancy advice (from Dialog) at a discounted rate (£1,500 for six days).
6. **Public consultation:** Comments on the draft Scheme were invited from parish councils, members of the Local Strategic Partnership, interest groups (including the

Ormiston Trust and the Commission for Racial Equality) and Council staff over a nine-week period during February – April 2006. The consultation opportunity was also featured prominently on the front page of the Council's website.

7. Most of the consultation responses received on the draft Scheme have been from SCDC managers. This has proved very useful in raising awareness & understanding, and helping to make the RES realistic and achievable. There were also replies from Haslingfield and Rampton parish councils: these can be found in Appendix A alongside comments on the issues raised. Members may also be interested to know that the specialist Dialog consultant (mentioned in paragraph 5c above) has reviewed the Council's Race Equality Scheme and has commented that it is comprehensive and a good example from a public sector organisation.
8. ***Recommendations from the Commission for Racial Equality:*** In May 2006, the Commission for Racial Equality published its findings from an inquiry into equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers in a 285-page report (and 26-page summary) called "Common Ground". Appendix B of this Cabinet report shows that, of 22 practices that the CRE recommends for local authorities, 15 are already in place at this Council, with another four partly in place and the remaining three already identified as future actions. Again, this underlines the good progress that has been made by the Council.

Options

9. The proposed update (July 2006) of the Race Equality Scheme is attached to the Cabinet agenda papers as a separate document. In the light of the considerations mentioned above, a number of revisions are suggested in bold italic print (on pages 2, 3, 5, 11, 13 and 15 – 21). The action plan at Part 5 has been updated, in particular, and actions have been added where there is scope for reflecting the CRE's recommended practice on Gypsy and Traveller issues more fully. Other changes to the Race Equality Scheme have been kept to a minimum.
10. Following the change to the composition of the Cabinet in May, there has been a change in the lead Cabinet member for the Race Equality Scheme (Councillor Edwards, as portfolio-holder for Information and Customer Services). That said, all portfolio-holders continue to be responsible for promoting race equality and good race relations through the services for which they are responsible.
11. There are two main differences between the updated Race Equality Scheme and the earlier version agreed by the Council as a consultation draft in January 2006.
 - (a) Although the Council continues to develop a strategic approach to Traveller issues, the earlier plans to produce a Traveller Issues Strategy, as a document in its own right, have been changed. The issues/actions that were going to be covered by a strategy have already been identified via this Race Equality Scheme action plan, the Council's 2006/07 Performance Plan (featuring key actions from the Traveller Issues service plan) and a report to Cabinet in June 2006 on the preparations and timescales for the Development Plan Document. In view of competing workload pressures post-council tax capping, having to re-present these details - which are already in the public domain – in a separate strategy document could be seen as unnecessary duplication. In the absence of a stand-alone strategy, separate arrangements will be made for developing the Council's approach to race equality impact assessments - particularly for 'highly relevant services' mentioned on page 11 of the Scheme - by March 2007.

- (b) Two actions previously featured in the January 2006 action plan are proposed for deletion, as they are no longer seen to be appropriate. Officers now take the view that it is difficult to apply specific ethnic minority monitoring categories to Community Services grant application forms and guidelines (former action B3.7) because the form relates to community groups rather than individual residents. In addition, Environmental Health has also had time to reflect on the complexities of trying to carry out ethnic monitoring of food safety enforcement notices (former action B3.10): there is not always a correlation between the cuisine served by food premises and the ethnicity of the owners of those premises.

Implications

12. **Legal implications:** The Council has a statutory general duty, under the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equal opportunities and good relations between people from different racial groups.
13. **Risk management implications:** The Commission for Racial Equality continues to take a close interest in the Council's approach to Traveller issues, and the possibility of a detailed investigation by the CRE cannot be ruled out. This has been factored into the Traveller Issues entry on the Corporate Risk Register. It is hoped that the CRE will recognise the significant progress that the Council has made both on race equality and Travellers issues, particularly in the last 18 months or so.
14. **Financial implications:** If they were available in due course, further resources would be useful – particularly to provide support to front-line services which receive requests for documents to be translated into different languages. For the time being, however, the Race Equality action plan is being carried out within existing resources.
15. **Staffing implications:** By developing this Race Equality Scheme and action plan in consultation with Service Heads, steps have been taken to keep additional workload pressures on staff to a minimum. Timescales for some actions have been extended to ensure that they are as realistic and achievable as possible.

Consultations

16. Responses to the consultation are addressed in paragraphs 6 and 7 and Appendix A.

Recommendations

17. That the Cabinet recommends that the Council approves the updated Race Equality Scheme for 2005-2008.

Background Papers:

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

- Cabinet report on "Race Equality Scheme: Three-Year Review", 12 January 2006.
- Consultation draft of Race Equality Scheme, SCDC, January 2006.
- "Common Ground: equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers", Commission for Racial Equality, May 2006. Downloadable at: http://www.cre.gov.uk/publs/cat_gandt.html
- Cabinet report on "Gypsy & Traveller Development Plan Document", 8 June 2006.

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