

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 13 September 2007
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Improvement Manager

EQUALITIES

Purpose

1. To carry out an audit of equalities to establish what level of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) the council is currently at and what it needs to do to reach level one of the standard by December 2007.

Background

2. The Council needs to address the issue of equalities for a number of reasons:-
 - Legislation requires public bodies to ensure employment practices, and how they deliver services, accords with equal opportunity legislation.
 - The Corporate Governance Inspection report in February 2007 recommended that the council ensures its policies and behaviours address the needs of, and promote the wellbeing of, all sections of the community.
3. The Equality Standard for Local Government was launched in 2001 and is an assessment process to assist local authorities in examining and combating the institutional process that can lead to discrimination. The ESLG enables authorities to mainstream equality, thereby ensuring that discriminatory barriers are identified and removed. By working through the standard the council will identify disadvantages associated with race, gender, disability, faith and belief, sexual orientation and age and set targets to eliminate the barriers that create disadvantage.
4. The Equality Standard for Local Government has 5 levels. The first level of the standard tests for the commitment to implement all aspects of the standard and that the authority is taking preparatory steps for level 2. The next level tests that the council has initiated the recommended consultation processes as well as fully implemented a prioritised sequence of service impact assessments. As well as this level 2 will test that the authority is planning the development of objectives and targets on equalities. Level 3 tests for the development of employment and service delivery targets and that monitoring processes are in place. Levels 4 and 5 test the effectiveness of the monitoring systems and finally achievements of targets and change in employment service delivery. The table below shows the progress of councils in achieving the different levels of the standard.

Summary of the 2005-06 Equality Standard BVPI data

Type of Authority	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
County	1	10	15	8	0	0
District	28	132	61	15	1	1
London Borough	0	2	16	10	2	3

Met District	0	7	16	13	0	0
Unitary Authority	1	11	21	14	0	0
Total	30	162	129	60	3	4

South Cambridgeshire District Council has not reached level 1 but has committed to do so by December 2007.

5. The Corporate Governance Inspection Report published in February 2006 was critical of the council's progress towards implementing equalities legislation. The Improvement Plan drawn up by the council to address the issues raised in the CGI report was adopted by the Council on the 24 April and commits the council to:-
 - * Carry out an audit of equalities by September 2007
 - * Achieve level 1 of the equality standard for local government by December 2007.
6. The new corporate objectives agreed by council on the 19 July 2007 include a service priority to work towards level 2 of the equalities standard.

Considerations

7. The first step in establishing what level of the ESLG the council has achieved is to assess the policies and plans already in place to promote equality. These plans are:-
 - (a) Equality and Diversity Policy adopted by the council in October 2003. This policy is now out of date and needs to be reviewed. The policy does set out clearly the council's commitment to equality but does not demonstrate links to the new duty to produce a Race Equality Scheme, Disability Scheme or Gender Equality Scheme. The policy sets out a number of ways equality and diversity can be achieved, however many of these actions have not been followed through such as the establishment of a equalities group of officers, members and trade union reps to monitor and review progress.
 - (b) Race Equality Scheme. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 places a duty on every council to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. The first Race Equality Scheme (RES) was adopted by the council in May 2003 and it was reviewed in 2006. The RES is a comprehensive scheme with a robust evidence base particularly in relation to gypsies and travellers. The action plan which forms part of the scheme is also comprehensive and was due to be reported back to cabinet by July 2007. It appears that a number of actions due to be progressed have not kept to timetable.
 - (c) Disability Scheme. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 amended 2005 placed a duty on public bodies to introduce a Disability Scheme by October 2006. The council has published its scheme however it is apparent from the action plan that a number of actions are not being progressed. This scheme is due for review in 2009.

(d) Other initiatives. Council services are engaged in a number of initiatives that promote positive race relations and community cohesion. These initiatives include:-

- Food hygiene and health and safety training courses available in ethnic minority languages
- The Anti Social Behaviour Task Group have made Acceptable Behaviour Contracts available in makaton if necessary
- The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) has promoted community cohesion through initiatives such as a digital storytelling project with local Gypsies and Travellers
- A translation service is provided on request for those who need information about council services
- Support to the Girton Pakistani Health Project which is aimed at providing health and fitness opportunities within the Pakistani community

8. The requirements to reach level 1 of the ESLG are set out in **Appendix A** however it is important to remember that this first level is concerned with the council committing itself to the introduction of the standard and a realistic timetable with resources to do so, it does not expect processes to be completed but underway.

9 The critical requirements that will need to be in place by December are summarised below:-

- Establishment of a cross cutting equalities group to co-ordinate the introduction of the equality standard and to provide leadership in the development of authority-wide policy and practice. An Equal Opportunities Steering Group of officers, trade union representation and the portfolio holder has been established and has met twice and will oversee the development of policy on equalities.
- A review of the current Equality and Diversity Policy in order to develop a Comprehensive Equality Policy. The Comprehensive Equality Policy will need to commit to achieving equality in race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation. This will be developed with the EOSG and brought to cabinet in November 2007.
- The development of a Corporate Equality Plan demonstrating how the policy will be implemented. The Race Equality Scheme, the Disability Scheme and the new requirement to produce a Gender Equality Scheme should be integrated into the Corporate Equality Plan. As above this will be developed with the EOSG.
- A preliminary review of the authorities functions, policies and procedures and prioritisation of areas for more thorough assessment. A draft list of these functions, policies and procedures is attached at **Appendix B**.

- Draft Service Plans that demonstrate a commitment to equality action planning and target setting in services.
- A self assessment demonstrating how the council has reached level 1 of the ESG. External assessment is only necessary at levels 3-5.

Consultations

10. In order to achieve level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government the authority is required to commit to develop a corporate participation strategy in relation to appropriate aspects of equality policy (see appendix A).

Implications

11	Financial	Resources have been targeted to address equality issues and the post of a full time Equality and Diversity officer has been created and resources for equality training has been requested from Building Capacity East.
	Legal	Not having the necessary processes in place to ensure all equality legislation is being addressed has exposed the council to risk of challenge in this area. The introduction of the Equality Standard and the associated policies, procedures and training will decrease this risk significantly
	Staffing	The new Equality and Diversity officer commences work with the authority in September 2007. The work outlined in the appendix will impact on the whole council and there will be a requirement for all officers and members to involve themselves in equality issues.
	Risk Management	The steps outlined in this report reduce the risks associated with the equalities legislation. It is an area, however, that will need to be constantly reviewed once the necessary processes are in place.
	Equal Opportunities	This has been addressed in the main body of this report

Conclusions/Summary

12. The council has already demonstrated its commitment to equalities and diversity in its new corporate objectives and the appointment of a full time equality and diversity officer. This commitment now needs to be translated into actions so that Members, staff and partners are clear of their responsibilities and can ensure that services are delivered equally to the whole community.

Recommendations

13. That cabinet notes this report and agrees the action plan set out in Appendix A.

Background Papers: The Equality Standard Guidance 2 The Employers' Organisation for Local Government revised 2007.

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