

## SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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**REPORT TO:** Policy Development Committee

12 December 2007

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### EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

#### Purpose

1. To consider the attached (Appendix A) self-assessment for the attainment of level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
2. To examine the draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy (Appendix B) issued for discussion by Cabinet on the 13 December 2007 and make recommendations for its improvement.

#### Background

3. The Council needs to address the issue of equalities for a number of reasons.
  - The report of the Corporate Governance Inspection in February 2007 highlighted the need for the Council to address equality issues as a priority.
  - There is a requirement that each local authority upholds equal opportunities legislation.
  - The changing nature of the district requires us to re-shape services to meet the needs of a more diverse community.
4. In order to meet its duties in relation to equalities the Council has committed itself to reach Level 1 of the Equality Standard by December 2007.
5. 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 processes that can lead to discrimination. The equality standard has 5 levels; the Council has not yet reached Level 1 unlike the majority of district councils across the country.
6. This report invites Members of the Policy Development Committee to consider the Council's self assessment for attaining Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and also asks them to consider the draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy which is in a period of consultation until March 2008.

#### Self-Assessment

7. The process for attaining each level of the Equality Standard for Local Government is set out in IDeA guidance. Level 1 is attained when the Council is able to demonstrate it has made a commitment to equality. A summary of the five levels is set out below:-

Level 1: Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy

Level 2: Assessment and Consultation

Level 3: Setting equality objectives and targets

Level 4: Information systems and monitoring against targets  
 Level 5: Achieving and reviewing outcomes

8. In order to demonstrate that the Council has met the requirements set down in guidance it is required to complete a self-assessment. A copy of this self-assessment is included at appendix A. All aspects of the self assessment will have been completed when the draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy is considered and hopefully adopted by Cabinet on the 13 December 2007.

Draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy

9. A copy of the draft policy and the consultation timetable is attached at Appendix B and C. This policy is now undergoing a period of consultation and will not be adopted in its final form until March 2008. There is now an opportunity for the Policy Development Committee to contribute its view during this consultation period. This committee may wish to:-

- Gather existing consultation data
- Carry out further consultation of members, officers and external stakeholders and partners
- Desktop research on best practice
- Seek expert's views – if time
- Scrutinise self-assessment process and results
- Formulate recommendations for the final Policy

**Implications**

- 10.

Financial	A budget of £10,000 has been established for 2008/9 for equalities work.
Legal	The Council has a legal duty to comply with Equal Opportunities legislation and by implementing the action plan to reach Level Two of the Equality Standard will ensure it meets its duties.
Staffing	The full time post of Equalities and Diversity Officer has been established.
Risk Management	Out of the three CGI Report recommendations was the need for the Council to improve its performance on equality issues. If the Council fails to address this important area it is at risk of failing any re-inspection. As well as this the Council is also at risk of litigation if it does not implement the duties set out in Equal Opportunities legislation.
Equal Opportunities	This is covered within the main body of this report.

**Consultations**

11. This report has been developed with the involvement of the Equal Opportunities Steering group.

## **Considerations**

12. The Council has put in place the building blocks to address equality issues across the Council. The report to Cabinet proposing the adoption of the Comprehensive Equality Policy on the 13 December 2007 is the final building block and once adopted the Council will have reached Level 1. It is important to note, however, that this is the first step in a much longer journey and the Council is committed to achieving Level 2 of the standard which will embed equalities in both employment practice and service delivery. The Policy Development Committee can play a significant role in developing equality practice in the Council and can commence this by considering the draft Comprehensive Equalities Policy and commenting in the consultation period.

## **Recommendations**

13. Policy Development Committee is asked to:
  - (a) Consider the self-assessment for attainment of level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and agree, that subject to the adoption of the draft Comprehensive Equality Policy, that the Council has now reached Level 1.
  - (b) Examine the draft Comprehensive Equality Policy over the next three months and formulate recommendations for the final Policy by identifying which of the activities in paragraph 9 the committee would like to conduct.

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

IDeA Guidance on the Equality Standard for Local Government updated May 2007 and November 2007.

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