

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 2 July 2009
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Interim Corporate Manager, Community & Customer Services

EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT – LEVEL 2

Purpose

1. To inform Cabinet of the Council's progress in mainstreaming equality and diversity against the Equality Standard for Local Government and to recommend that Cabinet endorse that the Council is at Level 2.
2. This is a key decision because:
 - it is significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in all wards of the District.
 - it raises new issues of policy, is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework and 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.

Background

3. The Council has identified equalities as a priority area in which it must make progress because of the findings of the Corporate Governance Inspection of 2007/08; the need to achieve compliance with statutory requirements; and deliver relevant Council Aims and Actions. The Improvement Board also identified this as a key area for the Council. The Council also needs to be more in step with its partners in the LSP and LAA. Equality and diversity will be an area of focus for the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA).
4. Progress has been held back over the last year because of the illness and subsequent sad death of the former Equality and Diversity Officer and the need to address other improvement priorities.
5. A new Equality and Diversity Officer, Paul Williams, has been in post since January 2009 and the secondment of Equalities Project Officer, Andrew Francis, to support Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) has further strengthened the progress made by the Council on equalities. Further capacity has been provided through consultancy support for the development and revision of the policy framework.
6. The Equality Standard for Local Government was introduced in 2001 to help local authorities make progress in mainstreaming equality. In December 2007, following input from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, South Cambridgeshire District Council declared that it was at Level 1.

7. An essential part of the Equality Standard for Local Government is for the authority to express its commitment to equality and diversity through the development of a Comprehensive Equalities Policy, which was adopted by Cabinet in April 2009.
8. The Council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy set out a commitment that it would progress to Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by the end of June 2009.

Considerations

9. On 10 June 2009, Stuart Elrick, Principal Consultant from the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) conducted a peer review of South Cambridgeshire District Council. Although it is acceptable for a local authority to self-declare at Level 2, a peer assessment was arranged to improve transparency and confidence in the Council's commitment to equalities.
10. Stuart Elrick concluded that South Cambridgeshire was indeed a Level 2 authority and to quote the Principal Consultant's view: "...they are a lot further on their equality journey than they thought (or wanted to admit) - they are at level 2 and some of their work can be deemed to be that of an "Achieving" authority. They need to believe in themselves more and celebrate success with the staff on what they have achieved." A copy of the peer review report is attached at Appendix 1.
11. On 25th June 2009, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee will consider the peer review report and officer recommendation that South Cambridgeshire District Council self-declares at Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. The comments of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee will be reported to the meeting.
12. In April 2009, the IDeA published a new equality performance and improvement framework to respond to changes in legislation and the new challenges that local authorities face today. Local authorities have until September 2009 to merge onto the new framework model.
13. The new Equality Framework for Local Government is based on three levels, "Developing," "Achieving" and "Excellent." As South Cambridgeshire District Council has been reviewed as a Level 2 authority under the earlier standard, the Council will merge onto the "Developing" level of the new framework.
14. In considering the peer review report it is important to note that South Cambridgeshire District Council is now working towards the "Achieving" level of the new Equality Framework for Local Government and the new five areas of performance to be addressed are:
 - Knowing your communities and equality mapping
 - Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
 - Community engagement and satisfaction
 - Responsive services and customer care
 - A modern and diverse workforce

Implications

15.	Financial	There is a dedicated Equality & Diversity budget. The Council is being supported and sponsored by the joint East of England Regional Assembly and Improvement East project "Meeting the Equality Challenge." The Project consists of a variety of measures including training activities, master class workshops, and in-house support.
	Legal	Discrimination law protects people and the Council has a public responsibility to ensure that it adheres to its legislative requirements. Statutory duties in relation to equalities 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 and the Equalities Project Officer are responsible for mainstreaming equalities into the Council with the support of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group 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 Commission for Human Rights and Equalities inspection, <i>resulting in</i> reduction in reserves available to support balanced MTFs, adverse publicity and effect on reputation.
	Equal Opportunities	The Equality Standard for Local Government (and revised framework model) is based on the idea of equal life chances and helps local authorities to develop an equal society for the community, which it serves.

Consultations

16. The Equality Standard for Local Government Level 2 peer review included consultation and challenge with representatives of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group, Executive Director, Steve Hampson and Lead Member for Equality & Diversity, Cllr Mark Howell.

Conclusions/Summary

17. South Cambridgeshire District Council was subject to a peer review to establish progress made on the Equality Standard for Local Government. The peer review highlighted that the Council is at least a Level 2 authority and is now in a position to self-declare and celebrate this success.
18. The peer review also highlighted that the Council was making good progress on its 'equalities journey' to become an "Achieving" authority within the new Equality Framework for Local Government.

Recommendation

19. It is recommended that Cabinet notes the IDeA peer review report and that South Cambridgeshire District Council self-declares its achievement of Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 - 2012

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