

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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**REPORT TO:** Leader and Cabinet

13 May 2010

**AUTHOR/S:** Chief Executive / Corporate Manager, Community and Customer Services

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### **GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME 2010 – 2013**

#### **Purpose**

1. To recommend that Cabinet adopt a revised Gender Equality Scheme, following endorsement by the Senior Management Team and a recommendation of support by the Housing Portfolio Holder.
2. This is a key decision because
  - it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in all wards of the District.
  - it raises new issues of policy, or is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework, or 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.

and it was first published in the February 2010 Forward Plan.

#### **Recommendation and Reasons**

3. That Cabinet adopt the final version of the revised Gender Equality Scheme in response to a direction from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) that its current scheme be amended in order to ensure it is fully compliant with the statutory duty set out in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975.

#### **Background**

4. The Council adopted a Gender Equality Scheme in 2009, but was required to urgently review the scheme in light of further guidance from the EHRC.
5. As a consequence, it was necessary to prepare and consult upon a revised scheme by 30 April 2010. In order to comply with the EHRC deadline, a task group was established to review the existing scheme and bring forward a new draft for consultation with a final scheme submitted to Cabinet for approval and adoption at its meeting in May 2010.
6. The revised scheme has been developed by a task group made up of service representatives from the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and has been endorsed by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Housing Portfolio Holder.
7. The revised scheme incorporates key improvements, which will address the concerns of the EHRC and ensure that the Council complies with the statutory duty as well as lead to positive and specific improvements in gender equality for the Council and wider community under the following headings:
  - Gender Equality in Service Delivery;

- Gender Equality in Employment;
- Addressing Violence in our Community.

### Considerations

8. A failure to adopt a revised Gender Equality Scheme, which is fully compliant with the Council's statutory duty and within the timescale set by the EHRC, may result in sanctions being taken against the Council.

### Options

9. Due to the urgent need to prepare and consult upon a compliant Gender Equality Scheme by the EHRC deadline, it is recommended that Cabinet adopt the final version of the scheme.

### Implications

10. Financial	Within existing budgets. The Council is being supported and sponsored by the joint East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) 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	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 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 Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) inspection, <i>resulting in</i> reduction in reserves available to support balanced MTFs, adverse publicity and effect on reputation. Some other local authorities have been successfully challenged by the EHRC for not complying with their direction on the requirements of the Gender Equality Duty.
Equal Opportunities	The Council's 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.
Climate Change	None specific.

### Consultations

11. Given the short timescale for adoption of the scheme, the Housing Portfolio Holder approved a 3-week consultation period from 29 March 2010 to 18 April 2010. This is below the 12-week period set out in the Cambridgeshire Compact, but nevertheless

was an adequate period within which to carry out meaningful consultation with the following groups:

- Meetings with key officers in relevant services, e.g. Community and Customer Services (community safety), Affordable Housing (homelessness and domestic violence) and Planning and New Communities (participation in physical activity by gender);
- An internal workshop, using the existing Equality and Diversity Steering Group;
- Discussions with neighbouring authorities;
- Discussions with relevant public, private and voluntary organisations;
- Discussions with District Councillors and Parish Councils;
- Public consultation via the Council's website.

12. In addition, the Council has received, and been grateful for, the support of a specialist consultant provided and funded by the EELGA.

#### **Effect on Strategic Aims**

13. Equality is an important element of our Strategic Aim to deliver first class services accessible to all and our Value of Mutual Respect.

#### **Conclusions / Summary**

14. The revised scheme incorporates key improvements, which will address the concerns of the EHRC and ensure that the Council complies with the statutory duty as well as lead to positive and specific improvements in gender equality for the Council and wider community.

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

Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 -2012

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