

Select Committee on Economic Regeneration – 12th January 2005

Proposed Corporate Equality and Diversity Priorities for 2005/06

Report of the Director of Law and Property

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the proposed corporate equality and diversity priorities for the Council in 2005/06.

2. Background

- 2.1 In its lead scrutiny role on equality and diversity issues, this select committee considers an annual review of equality and diversity at its first meeting of the municipal year. This includes employment monitoring information and analysis and reports on progress with achieving equality and diversity objectives for the Council.

- 2.2 The annual review also sets out corporate equality and diversity priorities and targets to guide work over the coming year. These form the framework for individual directorate's annual equality and diversity action plans which are taken to select committees in February/March each year. This report gives Members the opportunity to comment on the proposed priorities.

- 2.3 The proposed priority areas are set out below with specific targets indicated for each.

2.3.1 Race Equality Scheme

The Council's Race Equality Scheme was published in May 2002 in response to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. It sets out the Council's approach to promoting race equality. Within the Scheme, the Council has set out a 3 year programme of reviews of relevant service areas to improve how they are meeting the requirements of the Act. A revised Scheme is to be published by the end of May 2005.

Targets:

- Complete the service reviews set out in year 3 of the Scheme by 31st May 2005
- Complete a review of the Scheme and publish a revised Scheme by 31st May 2005

- Implement the action plan included in the Scheme

2.3.2 **The Equality Standard for Local Government**

The Equality Standard is a national framework which a local authority can use to assess how well it is progressing with equality and diversity and to plan improvements. The Council has reached level 1 of the Standard and is working towards level 2. An action plan is currently being drawn up by the Officers' Equality and Diversity Advisory Group in order to achieve the remaining elements required for level 2. A benchmarking group is being established with other West Midlands authorities to inform the process and to assist with scoping the work required to reach higher levels of the Standard.

Targets:

- Achieve level 2 of the Standard
- Develop an action plan for achieving level 3 of the Standard

2.3.3 **Disability Issues**

A new Disability Discrimination Bill is likely to be enacted during the current Parliamentary term with the duties in the Act coming into force around December 2006. Proposed within the Bill is the introduction of a new positive duty for public authorities to promote disability equality, which will be similar to the duty in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to promote race equality, and will include the publishing of a Disability Equality Strategy. The implications for the Council of this new legislation will need to be assessed during the coming year.

Existing disability discrimination legislation continues to be implemented, for example, with the rolling out of the Customer Access to Services programme and through the Disability Access Strategy agreed by the Executive in October 2004.

Target:

- Implement the actions contained within the Council's Disability Access Strategy

2.3.4 **Employment issues**

The Council is aiming to achieve a workforce which is representative of the diverse communities it serves in the Borough. A diverse workforce is best able to meet the range of needs to which the Council has to respond in providing its services.

A new personnel and payroll system is being introduced over the coming months and the opportunity will be taken to update records of employees'

ethnic origin and disability status by asking individual employees to amend their records if they are incomplete or inaccurate.

Targets:

- Work towards targets established for employees from black and minority ethnic communities and disabled employees in all directorates
- Complete a further audit of employees to enable them to declare whether or not they regard themselves as meeting the statutory definition of disability
- Achieve a figure of at least 96.5% of employees who have declared their ethnic origin

2.3.5 **Best Value Performance Indicator 2b)**

Best Value Performance Indicator 2b) covers a range of measures around race equality including for example improving customer satisfaction across all ethnic groups, increasing workforce representation from all local ethnic groups, improving staff perceptions of equal opportunities across all ethnic groups and reducing the numbers of complaints from service users of all ethnic groups. Further guidance on the indicator is awaited from the Audit Commission and benchmarking is currently being undertaken with West midlands regional local authorities to promote understanding and good practice. In order to improve its score against the indicator the Council will need, for example, to ensure that it more clearly identifies and achieves its key race equality outcomes.

Target:

- Achievement of an improved score against the Best Value corporate health performance indicator on equality BVPI 2b)

3. Proposal

- 3.1 That Members consider and comment on the proposed priorities for equality and diversity for 2005/06.

4. Finance

- 4.1 The costs of meeting the targets during 2005/06 will need to be met from existing budgets. Any costs in future years arising, for example, from implementing the new Disability Discrimination Act, or arising from the Race Equality Scheme reviews, will need to be identified in due course.

5. Law

- 5.1 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 replaces Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 with a new general duty on public authorities to work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.
- 5.2 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people in connection with employment, the provision of goods, facilities and services, and the disposal or management of premises.
- 5.3 The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 renders unlawful certain kinds of sex discrimination. In particular, Section 25 makes it unlawful for the Council in providing facilities or services (such as those arising pursuant to the statutory functions of the Council) to discriminate against any person seeking to obtain or use those facilities or services on the grounds of gender,
- 5.4 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

6. Equality and Diversity

- 6.1 The report proposes priorities for implementing the Council's equality and diversity policy during 2005/06.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 That Members consider and comment on the proposed priorities for equality and diversity for 2005/06.

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Background papers: The Equality Standard for Local Government; Guidance notes 1: Audit and self-assessment; Guidance 2: measuring needs/requirements and impact; Audit Commission Best Value Performance Indicators 2004/05