

Select Committee on Economic Regeneration – 11th January 2006

Report of the Director of Law and Property

Corporate Equality and Diversity Objectives for 2006/07

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the proposed corporate equality and diversity objectives for the Council for 2006/07.

Background

2. This select committee fulfils a lead scrutiny role on equality and diversity issues, which includes consideration of the Council's annual review of equality and diversity and the establishment of annual corporate equality and diversity objectives. These objectives cover key equality and diversity areas for the coming year. Progress with the objectives is reported in the annual review and they form the framework for individual directorate's annual equality and diversity action plans, which are submitted to select committees during the February/March committee cycle.
3. The proposed objectives are set out below and will be subject to consultation with members of the Community Representatives Panel. This report gives Members the opportunity to comment on the proposed objectives.

(1) Equality Scheme

The Cabinet has agreed to the production of a combined Equality Scheme to bring together the existing Race Equality Scheme with the legal requirement to have in place a Disability Equality Scheme by 4th December 2006. Pending duties under the Equality Bill which will bring in similar requirements for other equality strands will also be taken into account. The legislation contains a range of requirements in terms of equality impact assessments relating to the impact of policies and services.

- Complete the impact assessments listed in the revised Race Equality Scheme by 31st May 2006
- Assess the implications of the Equality Bill
- Launch equality impact assessment guidance and develop a programme of assessments across all directorates to feed into the Scheme's action plan
- Maintain or increase the score against BVPI 2b) on race equality
- Publish the combined Equality Scheme by 4th December 2006

(2) Equality Standard for Local Government

The Equality and Diversity Officers Advisory Group has undertaken a scoping exercise to assess the requirements of level 3 of the Equality Standard, the national framework for assessing and progressing equality work in local authorities. This has

been developed into an action plan with the aim of moving on from level 2 to level 3 of the standard. A target of 31st March 2007 would be a challenging but realistic one.

- Implement the action plan to achieve level 3 of the Standard by March 2007.

(3) People management strategy 2006-08

A people management strategy for 2006-08 is being developed to ensure that the Council has the right employees with the right skills and abilities, doing the right things to deliver its vision and priorities over the next three years. Promoting equality and diversity is a key component of the strategy and the objectives highlight issues from the strategy previously raised by the select committee as priorities.

- Implement the equality and diversity elements of the strategy.
- Produce and implement an age and employment policy and procedure to comply with the new legislation by mid 2006.
- Establish a full framework of flexible working policies by mid 2006.
- Achieve an increase in the number of disabled employees working for the Council.

(4) Disability Access Strategy

The select committee has considered a number of reports on the Council's Disability Access Strategy. The duty to promote disability equality within the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 will come into force on 4th December and the strategy will therefore form an important part of the Council's Equality Scheme. The strategy and the Act cover much more than purely physical access to buildings but the best value performance indicator on access to buildings provides one important measure of progress.

- Implement the actions contained within the Council's Disability Access Strategy.
- Achieve an improvement in the score against BVPI 156 on access to buildings.

Finance

4. Any additional financial implications arising from implementing the objectives, which will not be met through existing budgets, will need to be identified in due course.

Law

5. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 replaces Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 with a 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.
6. 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. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 will extend this Act by introducing a new duty on public authorities to promote disability equality.

7. 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.
8. 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.

Equality Impact

9. The report sets out key equality and diversity objectives for 2006/07 which will help to ensure that the Council pursues service and employment policies and practices that have a positive impact on different groups in the community.

Recommendation

10. It is recommended that:
 - Members consider and comment on the proposed corporate equality and diversity objectives for 2006/07.



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List of Background Papers: The Equality Standard for Local Government and supporting guidance notes; draft People management strategy 2006-08