

To: Value & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Audit & Governance Committee

Date: 14 April 2010
27 April 2010

Item No:

Report of: Simon Howick
Head of People and Equalities

Title of Report: Implementation of Equality Standards

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report:

The Purpose of the report is to provide an update on equalities issues, in particular, progress against the equalities standards set out in the Equality Framework for Local Government

Report approved by: Cllr Bob Price, Leader of the Council

Finance: Sarah Fogden
Legal: Lindsay Cane

Recommendation(s):

Members are asked to:

- 1. Note the changes to the Framework and the progress to date**
- 2. Note the challenges ahead in attaining the “Achieving” level under the Equality Framework for Local Government.**
- 3. Note the commitment and processes that have been put into place to attain the “Achieving” level**

1. Background

1.1 The Corporate Equality Scheme and an accompanying Action Plan and Equality Impact Assessment timetable were adopted by the Council in August 2008.

1.2 The Corporate Equality scheme incorporated the previous Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes and also included the other three equality strands: Age, Religion/Belief and Sexual Orientation.

2. Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

2.1 The Council is required to follow the standards set down in the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG), which replaced the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) in April 2009.

2.2 The EFLG is constructed around five areas:

- Knowing your community – equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive service and customer care
- Modern and diverse workforce.

2.3 There are three levels within the EFLG:

- Level 1 – Developing
- Level 2 – Achieving
- Level 3 – Excellent

2.4 When the Council adopted the Corporate Equality Scheme it aspired to achieve Level 5 of the ESLG (Excellent status), which is now contained in Level 3 of the EFLG. This is a very challenging target as it requires all departments to show tangible progress towards achieving outcomes which address persistent equalities and narrow the gap between the target communities. An excellent council is defined as one which works with all its strategic partners, and with the voluntary and community sector to achieve defined equality outcomes. The councils that have obtained Excellent status so far have tended to be Unitary or County Councils.

3. Progress to date

3.1 In 2008 and 2009, as previously reported, the Council received two reports from the Audit Commission which highlighted a number of weaknesses in the Council's corporate equalities programme. Since that time, significant progress has been made and the outstanding actions are contained in the risk section of the Service Transformation Plans.

4. Developing Level

4.1 The Developing Level of the EFLG was reached in October 2009. A self-assessment was undertaken and approved by the Performance Board which demonstrated that the Council had met the requirements for the 'Developing' status.

5. Achieving Level

5.1 To attain the Achieving Level there are four areas of improvement that have to be addressed:

- Service Transformation Plans
- Workforce Issues
- Best Practice
- Member Involvement

5.2 The process to determine whether we meet the Achieving level is a self assessment followed by a peer challenge (i.e. a review by peers of the Council's own self assessment, with supporting evidence, followed by an on-site visit to conduct interviews, hold focus groups, with employees, Councillors and other stakeholders).

5.3 The Service Transformation Plans for 2010/11 have taken into account the requirements listed in the EFLG for the level to be reached.

5.4 Heads of Service will notify the Equalities Advisor of the actions that have been taken and quarterly reports are presented to the Board member, the Organisational Development Board, the Corporate Management Team and the VAP Scrutiny & Audit & Governance Committees

5.5 Progress has been made in each of the four areas as indicated below

6. Service Transformation Plans

6.1 All Service Plans have a specific equalities section which details their equality objectives for 2010/11. The objectives are smarter than 2009/10 and have clearer milestones and targets. These all link directly with the Council's Corporate Priorities. People & Equalities will provide active advice to Service Areas in achieving their objectives in a similar way to the modus operandi of the HR Business Partners.

6.2 Across the Council there are approximately 60 equalities objectives in the various service transformation plans, some of which overlap across services, but each are owned by the relevant Head of Service who in turn is tasked with achieving them. Some of the themes include:

- Addressing access issues (e.g. buildings, meetings, language, benefits)
- Developing action plans arising from Equalities Impact Assessments
- Developing approaches to increase participation and ensuring services meet needs of users (e.g. Leisure, waste & recycling)

6.3 Each equality objective across all service areas has quarterly milestones together with an overall year end – target

6.4 These objectives will be tracked through the Council's performance management system, CorVu, and will be included in its quarterly reports by the Equality Advisor.

7. Workforce Issues

7.1 All employees are expected to have the opportunity to perform at their best. This means that they must feel comfortable in their environment. This is done through creating a diverse and inclusive workforce. All employees need to know and feel that they can be themselves in the workforce.

7.2 The People and Equalities Service Transformation Equalities Action Plan is robust and challenging. It is both outward and inward facing and looks to develop closer working with the community to increase representation across all the equality groups.

7.3 An Employee Equalities Audit has been undertaken to gain an understanding of our diverse workforce.

7.4 The Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedure is being reviewed from 'end to end' and consultation will take place with staff, the community and partners. A full equalities impact assessment will be undertaken and an action plan developed. The action plan will incorporate a programme of community activities to promote the City Council as an employer of choice.

7.5 As at February 2010, the Council currently employs 7 apprentices. The recent Future Jobs Fund (FJF) initiative has also introduced 2 new employees with more potential posts coming up.

7.6 The People & Equalities (P&E) team have strongly encouraged other Heads of Service to seek to maximise permanent employment opportunities and in particular consider employing apprentices and FJF employees wherever possible. Currently there are 7 potential opportunities and we expect to convert in the region of 3 of these into employment.

7.7 Proposals are being developed to take further positive action on apprenticeships. This programme will aim to recruit 10 apprentices targeting those from diverse backgrounds with a view to increasing the diversity of our workforce further.

7.8 2010/11 will provide opportunities for the Council to demonstrate itself to the wider city community as a potential employer, and also to provide assistance to people in attaining employment. This will include road shows where people can receive training on interview techniques, completing application forms, etc.

7.9 We will ensure that our employees continue to have appropriate training in diversity issues, but it seems there is an opportunity to provide something a little different to cement the principles. The P&E team will look at creative solutions to training in 2010/11. We will support managers in ensuring they continue to make appropriate recruitment decisions which support the growth of a diverse workforce.

8. Best Practice

8.1 The internet and intranet will be updated by the end of April which will not only demonstrate our commitment to our equalities journey but will also promote and celebrate success across the council.

8.2 The Council will use the Audit Commission's Equalities & Diversity Diagnostic Tool in 2010/11 which will help fine tune our approach to reaching "achieving" level.

9. Elected Member Involvement

9.1 After the Council's elections in May, the Diagnostic Tool will inform the requirements for Member involvement and development. Dependant upon the findings, this may involve training to enable Members to develop their roles as community champions.

9.2 The commitment of all Members to our equality objectives is key to driving through our leadership commitment to equalities.

10 Equality Impact Assessment responsibilities

10.1 To assist Heads of Service and their managers, the equality impact assessment process has been reviewed and a toolkit produced to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the process, requirements and individuals' roles and responsibilities.

10.2 The key goal was to produce a user friendly toolkit to ensure that service areas understood the process and therefore could focus on producing workable action plans with real and measurable outcomes. The toolkit offers practical advice with clear steps to follow. It also includes links on best practice and guidance. This will greatly assist the follow up to the EIA process

11. Conclusions

11.1 As this report demonstrates, the Council has a challenging journey to reach the next level under the Equality framework for Local Government. However there is commitment and processes in place to attain Achieving Level. We aim to reach the Achieving Level by March 2011 subject to requirements of the peer review.

12. Recommendations

12.1 Members are asked to:

1. Note the changes to the Framework and the progress to date
2. Note the challenges ahead in attaining “Achieving” level under the Equality Framework for Local Government.
3. Note the commitment and processes in place to attain “Achieving” Level

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List of background papers: none

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