

Report of: Chief Executive

To: City Executive Board

Date: 23 July 2008

Item No:

Title of Report: Corporate Equality Scheme 2008 - 11

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To submit the Corporate Equality Scheme 2008 –11 for adoption as part of the Council's policy framework.

Key decision: No

Board Member: Councillor Bob Price

Report Approved by:

Legal: Lindsay Cane

Finance: Penny Gardner

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2008-2011 – there are links to all of our corporate priorities.

Recommendation(s)

Council is RECOMMENDED to:

(1) agree to adopt the Corporate Equality Scheme 2008-11 as part of the council's policy framework, together with its Action Plan and Equality Impact Assessment timetable

(2) delegate authority to the Chief Executive to update and amend the documents as required by legislation.

Background

1. The Council has a number of different roles in regard to equalities: as an employer, as a service provider and as a community leader.
2. The Council has general duties upon it to promote equality alongside a specific statutory duty to publish three Equality Schemes:
 - Race Equality Scheme
 - Disability Equality Scheme
 - Gender Equality Scheme
3. Reports from the Audit Commission have highlighted issues around the corporate equalities agenda whilst recognising the good social inclusion work done by the council in the community it has never the less highlighted weaknesses:

'Equalities and diversity policies and procedures are poor' (Cultural Service report in January 2008)

'The council has been slow to maximise its overall impact on equality and diversity because, corporately, this is not coordinated effectively and progress against standards has been slow. However, it has been demonstrating commitment through a number of services that promote social inclusion'. (Annual Audit Report and Inspection Letter in March 2008)

4. In January 2008, we had identified that we were not complying with the statutory duty to publish the three Equality Schemes (Race, Disability and Gender). Although we had a Disability Equality Scheme agreed in December 2006, and a fully drafted Race Equality Scheme 2005-08, neither was approved by Full Council.
5. The consultation process reflected these different roles. In following consultation best practice, we consulted broadly on issues around our equality agenda before writing and consulting on a final draft.

Progress to date

6. In order to rectify these shortcomings we put in place a detailed programme of consultation and policy development that has a clear set of milestones and achievements:

Timetable	Achievement
November 2007 – May 2008	Consultation took place with a wide audience using different media
April 2008	Equality Board agreed and consulted on a set of Equality objectives.
April 2008	Equality actions included in Transformation Service Plans
May 2008	Agreed a three year programme of 'impact assessments'
June 2008	Action Plan agreed
August 2008	Corporate Equality Scheme 2008-11 to be approved by Council
By September 2008	Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government
By October 2008	All initial Equality Impact Assessments to be completed and published
By March 2009	Development of Age, religion/belief and Sexual Orientation objectives
By March 2009	Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government
By March 2011	Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government

7. This report presents a final draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2008-11 (Appendix 1) which incorporates the three statutory Equality Schemes in a single document. The Equality Scheme includes:
- Equality Impact Assessment timetable 2008-11
 - Action Plan 2008-11
 - Profile of city residents, workers and visitors and employee profile
8. Equality Impact Assessments are a tool used to assess the impact of our service delivery on our duties to promote equality and make changes accordingly. All service areas will have completed initial impact assessments by October 2008. We also have a duty to assess all appropriate functions of the Council every three years.
9. An Action Plan was developed to accompany the Corporate Equality Scheme. This plan for 2008-11 included information from: our Annual Service Transformation Plans, an audit of our performance against the Equality Standard for Local Government and responses to the consultation results.

10. We have an equalities training plan in place for 2008-11 and have trained 22 employees in 'how to undertake an Equality Impact assessment'. An equalities programme has been piloted at Oxford City Homes and a total of 120 have attended a 90-minute awareness-raising workshop. In total, £36,000 has been allocated from the Corporate Learning and Development Budget for 2008/9, of which £1,000 has been spent to date.
11. We have assessed the risk to the council of not implementing this Equality Scheme as medium. The risk register is attached as appendix 3 and gives details of how we are will mitigate these risks.

Next steps

12. We will implement the Action Plan 2008-11, and set up transparent and robust monitoring processes.
13. Monthly monitoring reports will be sent to the Weekly Business Meeting and then to the Corporate Performance Board, with quarterly reports to the Scrutiny Committee.
14. The Equalities Board will develop and implement a communications plan for equalities, which will include a regular newsletter, updates on the internet and intranet, and an annual equality conference.
15. The Equalities Board will ensure that the action plan is carried out and monitored and that our progress is clearly demonstrated both internally and externally. The Board will also work closely with the Equality and Diversity Group in Oxford City Homes to share best practice.
16. It is acknowledged and recognised that in order to achieve our equality objectives, it is important that the equality scheme is communicated to all staff and that staff receive training about how equality is relevant to their work. A three-year staff equality-training programme is included, as part of our Equality Scheme. The Equality Board will monitor the implementation of the programme. There is also a financial commitment from the Learning and Development budget for 2008/11 to support this commitment and the programme will be in place from September 2008.
17. We have a three-year timetable for undertaking Equality Impact Assessments which will be published as part of our final policies. Heads of Service will be responsible for ensuring the timetable is met and progress will be overseen by the Equalities Board and reported to the relevant committees.
18. Once the outcome of the procurement of the HR Management Information System is known, clear workforce monitoring will be established and published.

Recommendations

19. The Board is recommended to RECOMMEND Council to:

- (1) agree to adopt the Corporate Equality Scheme 2008-11 as part of the council's policy framework, together with its Action Plan and Equality Impact Assessment timetable;
- (2) delegate authority to the Chief Executive to update and amend the documents as required by legislation.

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Background papers: None

Appendix 1 – Final draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2008 –11
Appendix 2 – Summary of consultation feedback
Appendix 3 – Risk register for Policy, Performance and Communication