

POLICY SCRUTINY PANEL

4th December, 2007

Present: Cllr. Wilkes (in the Chair), and Councillors Freeman, Kellett, Lightley, Lodge, McDonnell, Simmons, Walker and Wolstenholme.

Also Present: Councillor Marsden

Apologies for Absence: No Apologies for Absence were received.

Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 6th November, 2007.

The Bullet Points from the Meeting held on 6th November, 2007, were approved as a correct record.

BULLET POINTS

EQUALITIES ISSUES

- The Director of Corporate Services was in attendance to give the Panel an overview on the current position regarding the Council's Equalities Policies.
- Members had been provided with a copy of the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy and an outline of the requirements necessary for the achievement of the five levels of The Equality Standard for Local Authorities.
- The Panel was informed that the Standard was set at five levels of achievement and that City of Durham was currently at Level 2.
- The Director of Corporate Services informed Members that most other District Councils were also currently at Level 2.
- Also circulated at the Meeting were copies of the Corporate Equalities Plan, the Corporate Equalities Action Plan, which had been utilised to achieve Level Two, and an Audit Report on the Council's Equality Policies from 2006, which had rated them as Excellent.
- On a point of clarification in relation to the Equal Opportunities Policy, the Director of Corporate Services explained that the final category on the list of grounds for possible grievance, "*Or any other unjustified factor*", referred to any type of grievance not previously listed in the Policy. The categories were prescribed by a National Document.
- The Panel were informed that the Council had in place the Corporate Equality Plan, which was an overall plan to achieve a certain level of The Equality Standard. There had been input from the Council's Equalities Steering Group and the Council had progressed from Level 0 to Level 2 of the Standard, which was the current norm for Districts.
- The achievement of Level 3 would generally necessitate the embedding of all Equalities issues into Service Delivery and the development of processes for measurement of the effectiveness of the Policies.
- Substantial preparation work and commitment of resources would be necessary to progress to Level 3. An amount of £10,000 would also be needed to pay for the External Assessment. A decision would need to be made as to the cost effectiveness of this, especially in the light of current LGR proposals.

- The three individual equalities pointers were, Gender Equality, Race Equality and Disability Equality. Policies in relation to each issue have been adopted and put in place by the Council. Action Plans in relation to each Policy have been drawn up to ensure progress against the Policies.
- It was noted that there seemed to have been an increase in the number of Appeals being heard. Members requested the Director of Corporate Services to provide them with the number/cost of Appeals against the Council, in relation to Equal Opportunities issues, over the past two years.
- Members also referred to the Audit Report from 2006. It was requested that the Director of Corporate Services provide Members with BVPI Figures in relation to Equalities issues, updated from those contained in the 2006 Report. Members also requested the projected date for the next Audit.
- It was agreed that for the next Panel Meeting, a draft scoping document be circulated for discussion, to enable Members to identify the parameters of this Scrutiny.

The Meeting terminated at 6.22pm