

Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Corporate Management Issues

22 November 2004



Equalities and Diversity Steering Group Report

Joint Report of the Equalities and Diversity Steering Group and Chris Tunstall, Deputy Chief Executive (Environment and Change Management)

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update Scrutiny about the progress that has been made in relation to the Equalities and Diversity agenda; in particular the findings of the report from Greenfield Consultants and the exchange visit to Warwickshire County Council.

Background

- 2 The Equalities and Diversity Steering Group identified the need for assistance to identify the work that is required to be carried out in order to maintain Levels 1 and 2 and to achieve Level 3 of the Equalities Standard. It also identified a need to learn from best practice in other authorities. To this end, Greenfield Consultants were instructed to consider the issues in relation to the Equality Standard and an exchange visit with Warwickshire County Council was arranged in relation to best practice.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTANT'S FINDINGS

- 3 The Consultants considered that the leadership given to the equalities agenda from Cabinet and the Chief Executive is particularly strong. They believe that there is evidence of a strong commitment to equality improvement at all levels within the Authority. However, there remain some pockets of resistance. It is their view that the developments that have been secured could not have happened in a short space of time. What has been achieved has been created by sustained effort over a number of years, as is clearly evident in a number of practices and policies that are in place within the Council. The Consultants considered that there were some outstanding developments which place the County Council as a positive lead on equalities work in the region. There is significant evidence in support of a claim to Levels 1 and 2 of the Standard, though there are elements that will need to be progressed and consolidated to sustain such a claim and allow for progress onto Level 3. These are set out below:

i **Self-Assessment**

Each Service needs to assess itself against the requirements of the Equality Standard and collect evidence to substantiate its progress. This process needs to begin as soon as possible so that the Authority can sustain a claim to Level 2 and progress within Level 3. Monitoring systems need to be established to collect data and measure progress against objectives and performance indicators.

ii **Equality Impact Assessments**

There is a fair amount of evidence of these being carried out, but practice varies between Services. There also needs to be clearer links back to the business/performance management process and evidence of outcomes.

iii **Consultation**

The equality agenda needs to be given a clearer footing within the Corporate Consultation Procedures. We also need to establish a dialogue with communities.

iv **Performance Management**

The developing performance management structures need to be integrated with the requirements of the Equality Standard to ensure that equality objectives are fully mainstreamed.

4 **Timescales**

The Equality Plan sets out the actions needed to achieve Level 3 of the Standard with most of the target dates for action set at the final date for achievement of Level 3, ie March 2005. In reality it will be necessary to achieve many of these targets well before that date, in order that there is evidence on the ground, of effectiveness in delivery. The Consultants therefore suggested that achievement of Level 3 by March 2005 was overly ambitious and this view is shared by the Steering Group. Cabinet has agreed and the date for achievement is now March 2006.

VISIT TO WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

5 **General**

Warwickshire and Durham are similar authorities, other than Warwickshire has a higher ethnic minority population, therefore has had to develop practices to address the issues that this highlights. For this reason we were able to learn a lot about practical issues from them. We are stronger on policies and other documentation and so will be able to assist them with the development of their policies.

SUMMARY OF VISIT TO WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

- 6 Warwickshire has a number of well-developed groups which relate to race equality, schools issues, social inclusion, older people, young people and those with a disability. The Race Equality Group and Disabilities Group are chaired by Chief Officers.
- 7 Warwickshire have progressed work on racist incidents to the extent that they have 2 full time officers dealing with the practical issues and solutions presented. They also have established a number of reporting centres for racist incidents. These include places of worship, community centres, a library and a school.
- 8 With regard to Consultation, Warwickshire have a more systematic and organised approach to consultation and have developed thematic consultation groups.

9 The Way Forward

The Steering Group considered the two issues at its meeting on 4 October 2004 and commenced work on an action plan to tackle the issues that need to be addressed. This has been further developed by the Executive Group of the Steering Group, so that it is clear what needs to be achieved and who is responsible for delivery.

SUMMARY

- 10 The County Council should be proud of its achievements to date in relation to the Equalities Standard. However, it still has a great deal of work to do if it wants to achieve Level 3. It has clear plans on how this can be done, but sufficient time needs to be given to allow the process to be completed successfully.

Recommendations

- 11 You are recommended to note the contents of this report.

Background Paper(s)

Greenfield Consultants Report.
Notes of visit to Warwickshire County Council.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

None.

Staffing

None.

Equal opportunities

Updating progress on Equality and Diversity agenda and identifying work to be carried out to achieve Level 3 of the Equalities Standard.

Accommodation

None.

Crime and disorder

None.

Sustainability

None.

Human rights

None.

Localities

None.

Young people

None.

Consultation

Equality Agenda needs to be given clearer footing within the Corporate Consultation Procedures.