

# Item 4

## REPORT TO STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## REPORT OF HEAD OF ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

6<sup>th</sup> January 2009

### STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP PORTFOLIO

### EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY – CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

#### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress made to date against the Corporate Equality Plan (CEP). The CEP is a key document in ensuring the Council drives forward the equalities agenda and has recently been updated in accordance with legislative requirements.
- 1.2 The CEP provides the overarching framework to steer the Council towards Level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) and to address actions relating to disability, race and gender equality. The CEP supports the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy and incorporates the race, disability and gender equality schemes.

#### 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 2.1 Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers the progress made to date.
- 2.2 The revised CEP, associated schemes and action plan are approved.

#### 3. CORPORATE EQUALITY PLAN

##### 3.1 Background

The Council has set a challenging target to achieve Level 4 of ESLG by February 2009 leaving a positive legacy for the Borough in terms of equality and diversity. The CEP is a prerequisite for achieving this and is key to strengthening and formalising corporate commitment to equalities which will be carried forward to the new Council.

- 3.2 The CEP sets out:
- Equality issues in Sedgefield Borough
  - The strategic framework
  - The Equality Standard for Local Government
  - Impact Needs Requirements Assessment Programme
  - Race, Disability and Gender Equality
  - Action to date
  - Implementation and monitoring arrangements
  - CEP Action Plan
- 3.3 **Race Equality**  
The Council's Race Equality Scheme is contained within the CEP and sets out how the Council will action its general duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, promote equal opportunities and promote good relations between people from different racial backgrounds.
- 3.4 This is the Council's fourth revision to its Race Equality Scheme (RES) and builds upon the work already carried out in this area.
- 3.5 **Disability Equality**  
This third version of the Disability Equality Scheme (DES) focuses on how the Council will action its general duty under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995 and 2004) which makes it unlawful for a public body to discriminate against people with disabilities by treating them less favourably in employment, in the provision of services and in certain aspects of education.
- 3.6 **Gender Equality**  
This third version of the Gender Equality Scheme (GES) sets out how the Council will fulfil its general duty under the Equality Act 2006 to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women.
- 3.7 **Progress to Date**  
**Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG)**  
Significant progress has been made to embed and mainstream the equality agenda across the Council. The Council achieved level 3 of the ESLG in June 2008 as verified through external validation and has set a target to achieve Level 4 of ESLG by February 2009. The action plan contained within the CEP details how this will be achieved. Whereas level 3 needs to be externally assessed, level 4 is self declared once a self assessment process has taken place and evidence is provided to substantiate a claim.
- 3.8 In order to produce the self assessment documentation, a sub group has been established and the remit of this group is to:
- Finalise the self assessment report and monitor progress against it
  - Co-ordinate departmental responses, evidence and actions to be completed prior to a claim for level 4

- Ensure the self assessment report receives critical and peer challenge

### 3.9 **Corporate Equality Plan (CEP) Action Plan**

#### **Leadership and Corporate Commitment**

Following assessment and consultation the CEP and associated action plan have been revised and re-published. Recommendations from the assessors report have been used to inform the action plan. The incorporated Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes have been updated and revised in accordance with legislative requirements.

- 3.10 All transition projects have been impact assessed in line with the re-prioritisation programme of impact assessment as part of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- 3.11 Work is underway to self assess progress against targets set at level 3 of the ESG utilising monitoring information where available.
- 3.12 **Community Engagement and Accountability**  
Consultation with communities continues through the impact assessment process and established mechanisms for consultation such as the LSP and the Borough's access to services group. Work will continue within the new Council to ensure consultation mechanisms are robust and reach all representative communities and groups within the Borough.
- 3.13 'Inform' and other media are being used to promote positive publicity on equality issues. Articles have included the Council's achievement of the Equality Mark (level 3), 'Escape to Safety' project at Woodham Community Technology College, 'Sedgefield Awards for Sensational Youth', young women in sport initiatives, intergeneration project work with Age Concern, disability gymnastics and the Chinese cultural festival at Locomotion.
- 3.14 A consistent approach has been developed for communicating to people with all types of disabilities such 'Browse Aloud' for the web site and talking newspapers. A corporate publication 'First Contact' provides staff guidance in dealing with customers specific needs. Translation and interpretation services are available.
- 3.15 Partnership working with other public bodies, in particular the Durham Equality and Diversity Partnership (DEDP), has enabled joint consultation events and improved information sharing.
- 3.16 **Service Delivery and Customer Care**  
The Council has commenced monitoring of equality issues with external contractors and partners delivering services on behalf of the Council.
- 3.17 The Corporate Complaints Policy is monitored for equality issues. The bi-annual report to Strategic Leadership Overview and Scrutiny highlights the fact that no complaints were received covering the six strands of equality.

- 3.18 In order to monitor the take up of services by race, gender and disability some equality statistics have been compiled across service delivery areas. Monitoring will be developed further via the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system within the new Council.
- 3.19 Gender, race and homophobic related incidents are reported and mapped via the hate crime reduction group and the information is analysed to inform service delivery.
- 3.20 **Employment and Training**  
Employment data is regularly analysed for trends and results used to inform equality targets such as steps to improve the under representation of men and women and people with disabilities within specific parts of the workforce. Data is reported via BVPI targets.
- 3.21 **Future Issues**  
The forthcoming Single Equality Bill is due before Parliament in the next session and will become law during 2009. This new legislation will have a major impact upon public sector duties and monitoring of external contacts within the public sector.

#### **4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Human Resources**

- 4.1 The CEP Action Plan details the specific resource implications and the officers responsible for delivering the aims of the plan. It is expected that this can be met from existing staffing resources.

##### **Financial Resources**

- 4.2 The financial implications set out in the CEP Action Plan can be met from the remaining Equality and Diversity revenue budget 2008/9.

#### **5. CONSULTATION**

- 5.1 The CEP has been subject to consultation via a number of organisations including County Durham and Darlington Race Equality Council, Gay Advice Durham and Darlington and the Borough's Access to Services Group as well as other officers within the Borough Council.
- 5.2 In July 2008, the Council took part in a countywide event to consult and further understand issues around economic migrant workers and the impact upon the public sector.
- 5.3 Consultation has been limited due to LGR and because the action plan will only run until March 2009.
- 5.4 The action plan will be monitored through the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group.

## **6. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **6.1 Links to Corporate Ambitions/Values**

The contents of the equalities plans and schemes referred to this report contribute directly towards ensuring Council services are provided in an open, accessible, equitable, fair and responsive way. The outcomes of the plans will contribute towards tackling disadvantage and promoting social inclusion of minority groups.

### **6.2 Risk Management**

The following risks have been identified via a STORM risk assessment and details of the mitigating action are set out in the Equality and Diversity Risk Management Action Plan (Reference OD 4):

- ❑ Non-compliance with statutory duties
- ❑ Non-compliance with the legislative framework
- ❑ Failure to achieve targets set out in the corporate plan
- ❑ Risk of challenge from minority groups
- ❑ Adverse inspection by Audit Commission

### **6.3 Health and Safety**

No additional implications have been identified.

### **6.4 Equality and Diversity**

The Council has a key strategic role to play with respect to equality and diversity and is committed to promoting equality of access to employment opportunities and appropriate use of its services and facilities regardless of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation or religious or philosophical belief.

The CEP, DES, RES and GES are an essential part of a Corporate Equalities Framework designed to firmly embed equality issues within the culture and day-to-day activities of the Council.

### **6.5 Legal and Constitutional**

The Council has a moral and social duty to recognise that discrimination does not take place whether within the workplace or in the wider community. However, the CEP will (importantly) enable the Council to meet the requirements of current and future legislation including, Race Relations Act (1976) plus amendments (2000, 2003), Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 and Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003.

The DES, RES and GES are legislative documents and set out how the Council will meet its duties arising from the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and

amendment 2003, Race Relations Act (1976) and amendment 2000 and 2003 and the Equality Act 2006.

No other material considerations have been identified.

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**Ward(s):** All wards are affected

**Background Papers**

The Equality Standard for Local Government – Guidance Document  
Sedgefield Borough Corporate Equality Plan