

# COMPREHENSIVE EQUALITY POLICY AND ASSOCIATED EQUALITY SCHEMES

## PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE & CUSTOMER SERVICES & HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

16 OCTOBER 2008

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### Wards Affected

County-wide.

### Purpose

To note progress on the work that the council has done in regards to its Comprehensive Equality Policy and associated equality schemes.

### Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision.

### Recommendations

**THAT:**

- (a) progress in implementing the Comprehensive Equality Policy and associated schemes be noted;**
- (b) the continued work of the Corporate Diversity Team and its implementation of the Equality Standard and the transition to the new Equality Framework be endorsed; and**
- (c) the importance of maintaining the progress and commitment to equality schemes to ensure compliance with its statutory requirements be recognised.**

### Reasons

- 1 The Comprehensive Equality Policy and associated equality schemes state the Local Authority's commitment to equality and diversity. They set out the specific actions that the Authority is going to take to ensure that it fulfils its statutory responsibility and legal obligations and continues to demonstrate community leadership.
2. Since the last report there have been significant changes both organisationally and nationally. Over the last 5 years we have been working towards the Equality Standard for Local Government, and are currently declared at Level 3 and about to undertake external peer evaluation. There is now a move to a more simplified "Equality Framework" that will sit alongside the new Comprehensive Area

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Carol Trachonitis on 01432 260616

Assessment (CAA) based performance framework for local government. There will be 3 levels instead of the 5 in the current Equality Standard. These are: Emerging, Achieving and Excellent, and this will significantly reduce the number of prescribed actions. The new equality framework will be introduced in April 2009.

3. This move away from a very prescriptive approach means that Local Authorities can use the new Framework to determine local needs, priorities and actions (in line with what is being expected by the CAA). However, there is a need to ensure that the legal public duties are not overlooked, and the need for all levels of the organisation to understand their responsibilities in delivering them are paramount.

## **Considerations**

### **4. Equality schemes – headline achievements (in the last 12 months)**

#### **Comprehensive Equality Scheme (CEP)**

- Declared at Level 3 of the Equality Standard in March 2008 (external assessment to be confirmed for November 2008).
- Completed year 4 of the rolling programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs).
- Year 5 underway with EIAs being completed in Resources, Environment and Culture Directorates and the services provided by the Deputy Chief Executive's Office.
- Training provided on equality and diversity issues at all levels of the organisation including elected members, Joint Management Team, senior managers and staff.
- Joint central induction developed to be delivered in October 2008 with a specific mandatory diversity session for Council staff.

#### **Race Equality Scheme (RES)**

- The new Race Equality Scheme (RES) approved by Cabinet on 1 May 2008.
- Herefordshire Council has supported the formation of four national associations; Malayalee, Polish, Lithuanian and South African. These four community-based groups, which are run by volunteers, contribute greatly towards the development of community cohesion, a priority of the new scheme.
- Events have been delivered for Black History Month (BHM), including a football campaign with schools, BHM talk, working with libraries on BHM events.
- Race equality training continues to be delivered through a number of different routes. These include team meetings, community meetings and EIA training.
- Continued promotion of the MeWe film. Elected members, members of the JMT, service managers, staff in the council, schools and community groups, have seen the film.
- Working with a number of local groups supporting migrant and seasonal workers. This is part of the community cohesion priority in the RES.
- Targets and objectives continue to be achieved for tension monitoring and complaint aid work .

#### **Disability Equality Scheme (DES)**

- A Disability Equality Training session developed and, so far, delivered to 121 delegates.
- Corporate communication and consultation guidelines now take account of accessibility issues.

- Council website now details more information which is important to disabled people in Herefordshire, eg. accessible venues guide, accessible public toilets, planned works to roads and pavements.
- All council job adverts placed on a disability-specific website in addition to usual channels, and much work done on developing more accessible recruitment processes.
- Concessionary bus travel now available for companions of disabled people.

#### **Gender Equality Scheme (GES)**

- Gender-specific issues continue to be highlighted in Herefordshire Council's EIA process.
- On-going support for Herefordshire's Women's Aid.
- Through the Rainbow Forum, working to support the "right to privacy" for Herefordshire's trans community.
- Helping to support female seasonal workers who feel vulnerable. This gender-specific issue has been highlighted through consultation and focus group discussions and requests for help.

### **5. Organisational Targets related to the Equality Standard**

#### **To Reduce Under-Representation Of Females In Senior Management Posts**

- The internal target for 2007-08 was 42% and we achieved this. The target for 2008/09 remains 42%. A recruitment show case event, was held for council employees aspiring to senior management roles. Current senior female managers were invited to speak openly about their experiences and to offer advice and guidance. Further events are to be planned.

#### **Seek To Improve Data Capture To Better Understand Access To Work Barriers**

- Data capture will be improved as part of the Connects programme. Any software that is implemented will be required to have an improved system of data capture in relation to the equality and diversity requirements.

#### **Awareness Of Responsibilities On Sexual Harassment**

- A refreshed Dignity at Work policy has been agreed by Joint Management Team on September 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 and will replace the existing policy on Bullying and Harassment giving a much more comprehensive set of guidelines.

#### **To Achieve The Investor In People Standard**

- Currently working towards the accreditation. A preliminary assessment for IiP was commissioned from the West Midlands Quality Centre and undertaken in October 2007. The results of this assessment have informed the different improvement initiatives currently on-going within the Council. An action plan is currently being developed with the overall aim of a formal assessment taking place sometime in the summer of 2009.

## **Legal Implications**

6. As a public authority we have general and specific duties to:
  - Eliminate unlawful discrimination
  - Promote equality of opportunity
  - Promote good relations between people of different groups

The specific duties relate to ensuring that we have our equality schemes in place with actions that demonstrate practical changes that impact on individuals' life choices.

As an employer, the equality legislation makes it unlawful to discriminate against employees or job applicants on the grounds of the six strands of diversity and specifically in relation to:

- Recruitment
- Terms and conditions
- Training
- Promotion
- Benefits
- Dismissal

If we do not have a robust system in place to ensure compliance we would be open to litigation.

## **Financial Implications**

7. Any reduction of resources would mean that we would be unable to implement the Action Plans associated with the Council's equality schemes and reduce our effectiveness and influence in partnership working/responsibilities.

## **Risk Management**

8. If we do not continue to drive the equality and diversity agenda, act on the findings of Equality Impact Assessments, and demonstrate actions taken, we are unlikely to fulfil the criteria required for Level 3 of the Equality Standard or the higher levels of the new Framework, and may fail in our statutory duties.

## **Alternative Options**

9. There are no Alternative Options.

## **Consultees**

10. Diversity groups.

## **Appendices**

11. Appendix 1 – CEP Action Plan.

## **Background Papers**

- Comprehensive Equality Scheme (CEP)
- Race Equality Scheme (RES)
- Disability Equality Scheme (DES)
- Gender Equality Scheme (GES)