

EQUALITY STANDARDS

PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FINANCE

CABINET

6TH MAY, 2004

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To approve an updated Equal Opportunities Policy ('EOP') and to note progress of and proposals for diversity work within Herefordshire Council.

Key Decision

This is not a Key Decision

Recommendation

- THAT (a) the new draft of the Equal Opportunities Policy be approved;**
(b) that the proposal for the Corporate Equalities Plan be approved;

Reasons

The Equal Opportunities Policy was first approved in July 2002. It has been updated to reflect changes in legislation.

Considerations

1. In April 2003 a corporate Diversity Group was set up to take the Council forward in its approach to equalities issues. Work to date undertaken by this group includes the ongoing "Respecting Customers and Colleagues-Diversity in Practice", Officer and Member training, and co-ordination of Equality Impact Assessment Process. Equality Impact Assessments will be carried out for all Council services (both internal and to the public) in a three year rolling programme and will be incorporated into all Service Plans [and will include the identification and provision of reasonable adjustments to comply with the requirements for the Disability Discrimination Act]. All services will be prioritised to be assessed in either year 1, 2 or 3.
2. Leading the organisation in the attainment of the Equality Standard comprises part of the group's terms of reference. The Equality Standard is a tool developed by the Local Government Employers' Organisation as a means of assessing how Local Authorities are progressing against the diversity agenda. The Equality Standard is a National Performance Indicator
3. In the 2003/04 Best Value Performance Plan, Herefordshire Council recorded itself as being at level one - "Commitment to a comprehensive Equality Policy". In order to

Further information on the subject of this report is available from
Jane Jones, Director of Policy and Community on (01432) 260042

begin to move towards level two it will be necessary to audit attainment against level one.

4. Level one will be audited by Herefordshire Council's internal audit team in March, April and May 2004. Initial discussions have already been undertaken with the principal audit manager.
5. Cabinet will be aware of the Council's existing Equal Opportunities Policy, which has been in place since 1998. Appendix 1 is an up-dated document. It should be noted that the changes within the document are mostly semantic in nature to clarify further the policy direction that will be taken in accordance with the Equality Standard. The EOP is intended to cover race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, age and access to services.
6. In order to implement the Equal Opportunities Policy, Herefordshire Council must commit to developing a Corporate Equalities Plan ('CEP') which will identify
 - Outcomes meaningful to sections of the community currently disadvantaged including multiple discrimination
 - Actions to be taken to achieve outcomes
 - Officers responsible for achievement of outcomes
 - Other resources necessary (include details of budget?)
 - Timescales for delivery
 - Specific targets and monitoring procedures
 - How the outcomes from the recently commenced programme of Equality Impact Assessments will be used to plan changes in service delivery
 - How progress will be internally assessed and scrutinised

It will be the responsibility of the Diversity Group to develop the CEP in accordance with these criteria.

8. In order to ensure that there is corporate ownership of the CEP, it should be developed in consultation with all Council departments and service areas. Furthermore, detailed consultation should be undertaken with various sectors of Herefordshire's community through constructive, two-way dialogue with groups such as (although not exclusively):
 - Disability Rights Groups
 - The Rainbow Forum (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual Group)
 - Age specific organisations (eg: Age Concern)
 - Young People's Community Groups
 - Faith representatives
 - Herefordshire Council Staff Race Equality Group

- Communities Against Racism Groups
 - Herefordshire Race Equality Group
 - Trade Unions
9. It should be noted that the CEP and the EOP will be formulated in addition to the Council's Race Equality Scheme and Disability Scheme. Both of these documents detail how the Council is approaching its responsibilities to specific pieces of legislation and in the case of the Race Equality Scheme is a statutory document. The scale of work currently required to ensure compliance with legislation necessitates separate documents for these issues. The CEP will contain extremely close reference to both schemes. It is proposed that they are integrated into the CEP when both schemes are revised, whilst ensuring that they still fulfil their statutory imperatives.
10. In order to be effective, diversity considerations need to be related to service delivery interfaces which means that commitment towards the following will be required from individual service areas:
- To contribute towards the consultation and scrutiny elements of the CEP
 - To continue with the process of Equality Impact Assessments, act upon the outcomes through setting targets for change in service plans and to engage in internal equality audit and scrutiny
 - To allocate resources where necessary to improve practice

Alternative Option

There are no alternative options.

Risk Management

The above approach has been devised with close reference to requirements within the Equality Standard, which is widely recognised as the leading tool to measure a public authority's progress in setting and achieving diversity objectives. Attainment of levels is also a National Performance Indicator. To deviate from the approach advocated within this report would leave the Council with no recognised mechanism for measuring its achievement on diversity. This would leave the organisation vulnerable during the inspection process and with little comprehensive guide as to recommended policy directions.

Consultees

None

Background Papers

None identified.