

COMPREHENSIVE EQUALITY POLICY

PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITY: CORPORATE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES AND HUMAN RESOURCES

CABINET

7TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

Wards Affected

All wards.

Purpose

To receive a report on the progress made in implementing the Comprehensive Equality Policy and to endorse the recommendations for change.

Key Decision

This not a key decision.

Recommendations

THAT

- (a) progress in implementing the Comprehensive Equality Policy be noted;
- (b) recommendations for change identified through the EIA process be endorsed, and that through the performance management and service planning process ensure that diversity is mainstreamed throughout all services, policies and processes.

Reasons

The changing and diverse nature of the community of Herefordshire should be recognised and acknowledged, along with the challenges this brings. The Comprehensive Equality Policy (CEP) is the overriding document that sets out the Council's commitment to achieving excellence and meeting its responsibilities to promote and implement equality when it is:

- Providing services
- Purchasing services
- Employing staff
- Working in partnership with other organisations

The CEP provides the focus to ensure that the Council meets the criteria needed to reach Level two of the Equality Standard by 2007. The CEP is underpinned by the Race Equality Scheme (RES) and the Disability Equality scheme (DES). It should be noted that both the RES and the DES are sub-sections of the CEP and therefore their action plans sit as appendices to this Plan.

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

The Council has taken a long-term approach to the Equality Impact Assessment process, choosing a three year rolling programme to enable services to look at a number of equality categories, not just Race as required by legislation. This will enable us to progress through levels three and four of the Equality Standard more rapidly as the ground work and needs assessment with regards to other equality strands (age, gender and disability) will have already been completed in advance of legislation coming into force. It also demonstrates us developing a proactive response to the needs of our customers.

Considerations

1. In 2002 Herefordshire Council adopted the Equality Standard framework for Local Government. The Standard is designed to enable local authorities to mainstream equalities in service delivery and employment, ensuring that discriminatory barriers preventing equal access to services are identified and removed.

There are five levels to this standard:

- ❖ Level One: commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy
- ❖ Level Two: assessment and consultation
- ❖ Level Three: setting equality objectives and targets
- ❖ Level Four: information system and monitoring against targets
- ❖ Level Five: achieving and reviewing outcomes

The CEP forms the basis of our commitment to equality in service provision, employment and community leadership.

2. The CEP Action Plan shows the progress to date and the Council's commitment to implementing the CEP. It provides a clear focus in order to ensure that the detailed requirements of the Equality Standard are fully met.
3. The Council has identified and recognised that Diversity is a cross cutting theme and is embedding it in its policies, processes and functions. It also recognises its significance in partnership working, and the Council is taking a leading role in driving this agenda with cross sector partners.
4. It should be recognised that we are a county with a considerable migrant/seasonal workforce. This has led to a request from the Cabinet Office for assistance with identifying data on migrant groups, the impact of immigration, local funding and public service statistics. We have also had a number of enquiries from Local Authorities interested in our migrant worker website and a number of organisations looking to us for examples of best practice. We have hosted a number of events to raise the profile of the work we are doing so that it is understood that this is real work affecting our county - not a "politically correct" driven agenda.
5. We are in the process of developing a timetable of consultation with our stakeholders with regard to the Diversity agenda, and it has been decided that this needs to be integrated into processes and methods already adopted by the Council. In some circumstances we consulted on specific issues as required by legislation for our Race Equality Scheme and Disability Equality Scheme, and the information we have gathered from these consultations will not only inform the schemes but also service areas identified through the process. Consultation on diversity issues must be incorporated into regular service consultations and not seen as an add on.

Risk Management

Not completing the timetabled programme of Equality Impact Assessments. This would reduce our chance of evidencing the corporate commitment to the Diversity agenda and this may result in the Council not obtaining Level 2 of the Equality Standard.

Withdrawal of resources would mean that we would be unable to implement the Action Plan. This may result in the Council not obtaining Level 2 of the Equality Standard and not progressing to levels 3 and 4.

Alternative Options

None.

Consultees

Diversity Group, Race Equality Steering Group, Disability Working Group, Race Equality Staff Group, Disability Staff Group.

Appendix

Comprehensive Equality Policy Action Plan.

Background Papers