

## PROGRESS ON EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

**Report By: Equality and Diversity Manager**

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To advise the Committee on the Council's commitment and progress in delivering the Council's statutory obligations on the Equality agenda.

### Financial Implications

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

### Background

4. 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.
5. There are 5 levels to this standard:
  - ❖ Level 1: commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy
  - ❖ Level 2: assessment and consultation
  - ❖ Level 3: setting equality objectives and targets
  - ❖ Level 4: information system and monitoring against targets
  - ❖ Level 5: achieving and reviewing outcomes
6. 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

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
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- Purchasing services
  - Employing staff
  - Working in partnership with other organisations
7. The CEP provides the focus to ensure that the Council meets the criteria needed to reach Level 2 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.
8. The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 requires organisations across the public sector to be proactive in ensuring that disabled people are treated fairly. However, this duty is not necessarily about changes to buildings or adjustments for individuals; it's all about including equality for disabled people into the culture of public authorities in practical and demonstrable ways.
- Eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the DDA
  - Eliminate harassment that is unlawful under the DDA
  - Promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
  - Take steps to take account of disabled person's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other people
9. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 (RRAA) places both general and specific duties on local authorities to promote race equality and prevent unlawful racial discrimination. The Act requires the Council to publish a Race Equality Scheme, illustrating how it intends to meet the RRAA obligations under the general and specific duty.
10. The General Duty requires:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination
  - promote equality of opportunity
  - promote good relations between people of different racial groups
11. The Specific duty requires:
- publishing of a Race Equality Scheme
  - publishing of a statement of the functions and policies, or proposed policies, which the Council has assessed as relevant to delivering the objectives of the RRAA. This assessment must be reviewed at least every three years.

12. The Council has taken a slower approach to the Equality Impact Assessment process, choosing a 3 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 3 and 4 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.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT the progress in implementing the Comprehensive Equality Policy, and on the development of the Disability Equality Scheme and the Race Equality Schemes be noted.**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Comprehensive Equality Policy
- Race Equality Scheme
- Disability Equality Scheme