

Report to Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel



Date of meeting: 23 February 2010

Portfolio: Leisure and Wellbeing (Councillor B. Rolfe)

Subject: Equality Framework for Local Government

Responsible Officer: S. Tautz (01992 564180)

Democratic Services Officer: A. Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To receive a presentation on the Equality Framework For Local Government; and**
- (2) To note arrangements for an informal peer challenge to be undertaken of the Council's current performance against the Equality Framework.**

Executive Summary:

1. (Deputy Chief Executive) The Council's progress in delivering equality of opportunity is assessed against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). The EFLG was introduced from 1 April 2009, and replaced the previous Equality Standard for Local Government, which provided a framework for delivering continuous improvement in relation to fair employment outcomes and equal access to services.

2. The former Equality Standard assessed local authority performance at five levels, where Level 5 was the highest. The Council's self-assessed performance against the Equality Standard at the end of 2008/09 was Level 2, representing its engagement in impact and needs assessment and consultation processes, and in equality action planning for employment and service delivery. The EFLG uses a wider definition of equality than the former standard, based on the principle of equal life chances, and focuses on the achievement of equality outcomes for all sections of the community.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

3. To raise member awareness of the Equality Framework for Local Government, and to enable the identification of the Council's successes and future challenges, as it progresses against the levels of the Equality Framework.

Other Options for Action:

4. None. Failure to monitor and review performance against the Equality Framework for Local Government, and to take corrective action where necessary, could have negative implications for the Council's reputation and for judgements made about the authority in the Comprehensive Area Assessment and similar corporate assessment processes.

Report:

Equality Framework For Local Government

5. Since 2001 the former Equality Standard has helped local authorities to make progress in mainstreaming equalities. However, over time the strengths and weaknesses of the standard have become clearer, and the new Equality Framework aims to respond to real equality outcomes and the new challenges that face local authorities. The EFLG builds on and recognises work already undertaken under the former Equality Standard, whilst containing many new features, and is based on three levels of achievement:

- Level 1 – ‘Developing’ (equivalent to Levels 1 and 2 of the former Equality Standard);
- Level 2 – ‘Achieving’ (equivalent to Levels 3 of the former Equality Standard); and
- Level 3 – ‘Excellent’ (equivalent to Levels 4 and 5 of the former Equality Standard);

6. These levels replace the previous five levels of the old Equality Standard. There are five performance areas within the EFLG, all of which need to be achieved within each of the three levels:

- (a) Knowledge of communities and equality mapping;
- (b) Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment;
- (c) Community engagement and satisfaction;
- (d) Responsive service and customer care; and
- (e) A modern and diverse workforce.

7. The Council has set a target to achieve Level 2 (‘Achieving’) of the EFLG by the end of 2009/10, performance against which is measured by a Local Performance Indicator (LPI 01). However, given the extent of the performance characteristics likely to be demonstrated by an ‘Achieving’ authority, it is considered unlikely that this Level 2 target will be achieved this year, and the target is therefore intended to be carried forward into 2010/11. Details of the Level 2 (‘Achieving’) performance characteristics are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

External Assessment and Peer Challenge

8. In January 2009, the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and Improvement East launched the ‘Meeting The Equality Challenge’ regional support programme, aimed at all local authorities across the region. The aim of the programme is to provide support to local authorities in moving to the new Equality Framework, and to make progress on achieving improvement across the levels of the EFLG. The support programme includes provision for peer support for local authorities, and is fully funded by EERA until the end of 2009/10.

9. The Council is participating in the regional support programme. Stuart Elrick, a former equality lead for the Improvement and Development Agency who is accredited by EERA in terms of its support programme, will be attending the meeting to make a presentation to members explaining the Equality Framework, its context in respect of Comprehensive Area Assessment, and how members they can get involved to fully consider the various equality strands.

10. Within the Equality Framework, there is a requirement that local authorities reporting their performance at the ‘Achieving’ or ‘Excellent’ levels, have undertaken an agreed external assessment to validate their achievements. As part of the regional support programme, the Council will be participating in an informal equality and diversity peer challenge during March 2010. It is considered that the peer challenge process is essential to the establishment of the authority’s base-line position, and that the results would enable the development and prioritisation of appropriate action to take the Council forward against the Equality

Framework. The peer challenge will also be undertaken by Mr. Elrick, and will be carried out over the course of one full day during March 2010.

11. The informal peer challenge process is not an inspection, but an opportunity for the identification of the Council's successes and future challenges as it progresses against the Equality Framework. The process will consider what has been achieved, what the authority's challenges are, and the barriers that may hinder progress to embed equality and diversity throughout the organisation. As with similar assessment/challenge processes, it is considered that the prior completion of a self-assessment would be helpful in order for the Council to understand its current equality and diversity position. The informal peer challenge will also involve a range of interview sessions with relevant officers and members, including the Leader of the Council and the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder.

12. A report on the outcomes of the informal peer challenge will be made to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel.

Resource Implications:

The East of England Regional Assembly's regional support programme includes provision for peer support for local authorities, and is fully funded by EERA until the end of 2009/10.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are no legal implications or Human Rights Act issues arising from the recommendations in this report. The Council is subject to a range of legal duties requiring it to identify and tackle discrimination, and to ensure that its work promotes equality and that equality is mainstreamed into its core business.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising from the recommendations in this report for the Council's commitment to the Nottingham Declaration for climate change, the corporate Safer, Cleaner and Greener initiative, or any Crime and Disorder issues within the district.

Consultation Undertaken:

The Council's participation in the EERA regional support programme has been considered and agreed by Management Board and the Corporate Equality Working Group. The contents of this report have also been agreed by the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder.

Background Papers:

None

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The failure of the Council to comply with legal duties requiring it to identify and tackle discrimination, and to ensure that its work promotes equality and that equality is mainstreamed into its core business, could have negative implications for the authority's reputation and for judgements made in the Comprehensive Area Assessment and similar corporate assessment processes.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?

No. The content of this report has no specific equality implications.

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
N/A

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group? N/A