

Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Panel

Date of Meeting: 12 March 2013

Portfolio: Leisure & Wellbeing (Councillor E. Webster)

Subject: Equality Progress 2012/13

Responsible Officer: B. Copson (01992 564042)

Democratic Services Officer: A Hendry (01992 564246)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That current progress against the achievement of the Council's Equality Objectives, and other work to ensure compliance with equality duties be noted.

Executive Summary:

1. The Equality Act 2010 places a number of responsibilities on the Council including a general equality duty to have due regard to equality in the exercise of its functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not. Further specific duties include the production of equality objectives to improve equality for service users and employees, and publishing equality information.
2. In 2009 the Council implemented a three-year programme of equality analysis designed to generate evidence of the impact policies and practices have, or are likely to have, on people with the different protected characteristics, and therefore the evidence to demonstrate the Council has taken due regard.
3. In March 2012, the Cabinet agreed equality objectives for the four years from 2012 to 2016 designed to help the Council meet the aims of the general duty and bring about positive improvements to service design and delivery. The equality objectives are supported by an action plan which sets out how they will be achieved and measured, and provides information on the progress being made.
4. This report reflect progress against the Equality Objectives, the duty to publish equality information and systems to evidence due regard. It also reflects other work to deliver greater equality for service users and employees which falls outside the equality objectives and other specific duties. Progress reports will in future be made on a quarterly basis, rather than at the start of each municipal year.

Reasons for proposed decision:

5. Equality objectives are intended to help public authorities to better perform the general equality duty, focusing on outcomes to be achieved. Periodic review of progress to meet the Council's equality duties provides an opportunity for the authority to consider how it can better meet its equality duties and improve outcomes.

Other Options for Action:

6. No other options are appropriate in this respect. The Council is required to publish appropriate equality objectives and to publish equality information to show its progress against the general equality duty.

Report:

Equality Objective 1: To develop existing customer and employee intelligence gathering systems and the use of intelligence gathered in service planning

7. The Actions to deliver this Objective, with the exception of equality analysis which was already implemented via the Customer Impact Assessment (CIA) programme, cover activities necessary to deliver the use of equality information in decision making and service planning and delivery, from the resources to support the activity, to evidencing its use. Outcomes include:
 - that the use of equality information in service planning and delivery is coherent, organised, and consistent,
 - that evidence of the use of equality information in service planning and delivery is generated:
 - that officers and members develop greater awareness and understanding of the Council's equality duties.
8. The resources to support the development of existing practices and systems of equality monitoring include a review and development of the existing Equality Monitoring Policy and Guidance for use by Directorates, a leaflet explaining why service users are asked for equality monitoring data, and a pilot exercise designed to generate experience and learning of equality monitoring activities in three very different services and which are at different stages of service development.
9. The Equality Monitoring Policy and Guidance and leaflet, were agreed by Cabinet in December 2012. The pilot exercise involved Private Sector Housing, the Assisted Collections Service, and the Sports Inclusive and Active programme. Service representatives have reported to the Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG) on the outcomes and learning from the completed elements of the exercise, and useful information from the exercise will be made available to Directorates as examples of equality monitoring in practice.
10. Other actions relate to the implementation of appropriate and bespoke equality monitoring systems within service activities relevant to equality to ensure appropriate investment of resources in equality monitoring activities. Services appear to be at varying stages of identifying and implementing equality monitoring activities.
11. Separate actions relate to a review of arrangements designed to support and encourage the use of equality information in reports to decision making forums. The purpose of the review is to strengthen current practice and develop awareness and expectation that equality information will form part of decision making processes. These Actions have a key date of March 2013 and the review is in progress.

Equality Objective 2: To ensure ownership of equality by those in a position to shape services (e.g. Members and Managers)

12. Actions to deliver this Objective are focused around training, information sharing, and introducing directorate based reporting of equality information. Outcomes include:
 - that member and manager understanding of equality and the Council's equality duties is enhanced;

- that members have due regard to the Council's equality duties in their decision making, and
 - that managers have due regard to the Council's equality duties in service planning and delivery, and report their equality achievements.
13. These Actions have a key date of March 2013 for reviews to have been completed. Whilst an Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Task and Finish Group assessment was identified as a potential way to address an action to identify and explore opportunities for the Council and its partners to share equality awareness and information, this has yet to be taken forward.
 14. The take up of equality training by Members is consistently low and refreshing the training including a consideration of different mechanisms for delivery, is appropriate to stimulate take-up. With regard to officers, currently equality training is available for all employees and mandatory for all front-line employees. Actions to deliver the Objective include a target for new employees to undertake equality training, and refresher training to all employees every 3 years. This action has yet to be taken forward.
 15. Formerly the Performance Improvement Unit (PIU) has produced the annual equality information report, drawing together information from services to demonstrate our progress against the aims of the general duty and comply with the specific duty to publish equality information. Directorate based reporting of progress is intended to raise the profile and priority afforded to equality within Directorates, and particularly the relevance and use of equality information in service planning and delivery.
 16. Guidance has been produced to support and guide officers involved in publishing equality information, and a training session provided to assist officers in identifying relevant information and producing their report. Individual directorate reports have been drawn together in one overarching report by the PIU and published on the Council's website in compliance with the specific duty to publish equality information to demonstrate progress against the aims of the general duty annually from 31 January.
 17. The CEWG has recently agreed further equality information will be published in June 2013 and annually in June thereafter to take account of and avoid the busy period earlier in the year as a result of budget preparation processes.

Equality Objective 3: To develop engagement across all the protected equality groups

18. Actions to deliver this objective are focused on the enhancement of engagement with residents and customers to ensure it is coherent and prioritised. Outcomes include:
 - a better understanding by members and officers of the views and priorities of residents and customers;
 - that the views and priorities of residents and customers are taken into account in the planning and delivery of services; and
 - an understanding of the impact of Council services on protected groups is taken into account in service planning and delivery.
19. The production of an equality profile of the District to inform, focus and prioritise equality engagement is being progressed via a consideration of the potential of the Local Futures Knowledge System to provide data against which equality based engagement can be planned. Officers from the PIU have undertaken the Introduction to Local Future training session and this will be explored further in the coming months.
20. Other actions refer to the identification of opportunities for engagement, the production of an engagement plan and carrying out the engagement according to the plan, taking into account the potential for working in partnership and the existence of and access to community groups. The Consultations and Marketing Officer will undertake a scoping exercise to identify existing engagement including that by the LSP. This scoping

exercise is in progress. From this an engagement plan will be produced to place current engagement on a more focused footing and to facilitate further engagement throughout the lifetime of the Objective.

21. The PIU is planning to meet Essex County Council Equalities Team to explore the potential to work in partnership in relation to engagement with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT).
22. The interaction between Members and Community Groups will be to some extent informed by the scoping exercise referred to in 3.2. Whilst engagement is known to take place between Members and community groups with the protected characteristics, this has yet to be identified and assessed for the purposes of this action, with a view to identifying and exploiting opportunities.

Equality Objective 4: To ensure a culture, systems and working practices which allow for the development of a senior management profile representative of the Council workforce as a whole.

23. Actions to deliver this Objective are focused around the following outcomes:
 - enhanced confidence amongst employees that policies, processes and procedures are fair, transparent and non-discriminatory;
 - demonstrable evidence of the Council's commitment to equality for its employees;
 - enhanced transparency regarding the Council's policies, processes and procedures which affect employees; and
 - fully inclusive and effective consultation systems for the Council to consult with its employees.
24. Actions concern systems and focus on both data and analysis, and recruitment and selection and have timescales of June and September 2013. Other actions concern the culture of the organisation and focus on awareness and commitment, including investigation appropriate standards and accreditations to help demonstrate the Council's commitment to equality, with full regard to previous decisions in respect of the cost of achieving such standards. Agreement has been reached with PR and Marketing to publicise material relating to all equality characteristics to promote employee equality awareness and demonstrate employer equality commitment. Other actions involve working practices and focus on information and employee engagement..
25. A review of existing arrangements for employee engagement considering the different levels of engagement, the extent to which the Council undertook engagement at the different levels, and how effective they were, was completed by the Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG) in September 2012. Recommendations included:
 - that social media be considered and in particular a Community on ITrain;
 - a staff information bulletin; and
 - issue based engagement and information sessions.
26. These issues have previously been considered by Management Board. Other matters arising from the review will be the subject of future review.

Engagement established prior to the adoption of the equality objective

27. In 2012 the Council commissioned Essex Gay (EGM) an LGBT voluntary sector support group to undertake a survey of the LGBT community in the District to gather information about the experiences and priorities for LGBT people living, working or socialising in the district. The outline findings were reported to CEWG in November 2012. The full report together with recommendations for further actions, will be delivered to CEWG in March 2013.

28. The Council also commissioned EGM to set up and run 'drop-in' meetings on a monthly bases within the district. EGM report these sessions to be attracting some support within the LGBT community in the district. CEWG is to consider how the recommendations from the survey can be taken forward and the 'drop-in' meetings supported, at its next meeting in March 2013.
29. The Council has long supported a disability equality group to help progress the Council's equality work. Difficulties in attracting consistent and active support for the group together led to a move to social networking format via facebook and the groups re-launch in October 2012 as the Epping Forest Disability Forum.
30. The Council supported and the PIU attended the International Day for People with Disabilities in Chelmsford in December 2012, an event which celebrated the disabled community and continued the Paralympics' legacy.
31. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to note the contents of this report and the progress of work to develop equality across the Council and meet the Council's equality duties.

Resource Implications:

The achievement of the Council's corporate equality responsibilities can currently be met from within existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are no legal implications or Human Rights Act issues arising from this report, which seeks to ensure the development and coordination of a corporate approach to the Council's statutory equality duties.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising from this report in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the corporate Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative, or any Crime and Disorder issues within the district. Relevant implications arising from actions to deliver specific equality objectives for 2012-2016, will be identified by the responsible service director/chief officer

Consultation Undertaken:

The progress reflected in this report has been reviewed and considered by Management Board and the Corporate Equality Working Group.

Background Papers:

Equality Scheme 2012-16

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

There are no risk management issues arising from this report. Relevant risk management issues arising from actions to achieve specific equality objectives for 2012-2016, will be identified by the responsible service director/chief officer.

Equality

This report seeks to ensure the development and coordination of a corporate approach to the Council's statutory equality duties.