

Report to the Cabinet



Report reference: C/004/2007-08.

Date of meeting: 11 June 2007.

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance, Performance Management and Corporate Support Services.

Subject: Corporate Equality Action Plan.

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Cabinet note the significant improvement in performance in BVPI 2b, ('The quality of an Authority's Race Equality Scheme) for 2006/07, representing the return on the investment put into this area during the last year;
- (2) That Cabinet note that if similar progress is to take place with respect to BV2a ('The level of the Equality Standard for Local Government to which the Authority conforms in respect of gender, race and disability') it is a requirement to have in place a Corporate Equalities Action Plan;
- (3) That Cabinet comment on and agree the draft Corporate Equalities Action Plan set out at Appendix one to this report, and note that it may be amended following further community and staff consultation; and
- (4) That Cabinet agree that the Corporate Equalities Action Plan be monitored on an annual basis by the Finance and Performance Management Scrutiny Standing Panel.

Report:

1. At the April 2007 meeting of Cabinet agreement was given to a Disability Equality scheme and Gender Equality Scheme for the Council, thus complementing the existing Race Equality Scheme. A significant amount of work has taken place over the last year in terms of equalities work, much of this driven by legislative requirements. To this end, it should be noted that performance against BV2b 'The quality of an Authority's Race Equality Scheme (RES) and the improvements resulting from its application' has improved from a score of 63% in 2005/06 to 89% at the end of 2006/07. This places the Authority's performance against this indicator in the top quartile of English District Councils, and represents a significant return on the investment put into this area during the last two financial years.

2. In tandem with this Authorities are expected to make progress against the Equality Standard for Local Government, which is measured by BV2a 'The level of the Equality Standard for Local Government to which the Authority conforms in respect of gender, race and disability'. This standard sets out a number of actions Councils must take in order to show an improvement in and commitment to developing equalities issues.

3. Currently EFDC has attained Level 1 of the Equality Standard, which is defined as:

'The Authority has adopted a comprehensive equality policy including commitments to develop equality objectives and targets, to consultation and impact assessment, monitoring, audit and scrutiny'.

However, in practice much more work has been done than would warrant only the award of Level 1. To attain Level 2 the Authority needs to demonstrate that:

'...it has engaged in an impact and needs assessment process, a consultation process and an equality action planning process for employment and service delivery'.

4. To date we have carried out impact and needs assessments and have in place a consultation strategy and programme. The one element outstanding to attain Level 2 is the establishment of a Corporate Equality Action Plan, and consultation with appropriate stakeholders. This is not too onerous as the impact assessments that have already been carried out by services have generated not only service-specific action plans but also a range of corporate tasks required to embed equalities matters firmly in the Authority. These can now be taken forward as forming the main elements of the Corporate Equality Action Plan.

5. Attached to this report is a draft Corporate Equality Action Plan based upon these principles. Cabinet will note that the timescale for completing this Plan is five years, given the overarching nature and complexity of some of the tasks contained within it. Also, whilst forming a sound basis for taking the Authority forward and attaining Level 2 of the Standard, the Action Plan is effectively an evolving document, on the basis that the Authority is already committed under its Disability and Gender Equality Schemes to consultation with staff, the public and service users on equality issues. It is therefore highly likely that the Plan may need to be amended in due course, in the light of feedback received. If this is the case any amendments will be presented to Cabinet for consideration.

Statement in Support of Recommended Action:

6. The development of the Council's Corporate Equality Scheme provides a sound platform on which to build future equality developments on a corporate basis. It also complements the existing, ongoing work being carried out in Services with respect to equalities matters, as reflected in their current Service Plans.

Other Options for Action:

7. The Council could decide not to seek to attain Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. However, given the substantial work that has already been done it is sensible to recognize this work formally by attaining level 2.

Consultation undertaken:

8. Consultation with representatives from a range of minority groups is scheduled to take place over the medium term as part of the Disability and Gender Equality Schemes. This consultation will inform the future development of the Corporate Equality Action Plan.

Resource implications:

Budget Provision: None at this stage, although the implementation of the Plan will require resources at a later date. At this stage the amounts required cannot be identified.

Personnel: The Action Plan has both community facing and human resources actions contained within it. These will be developed as the Plan is implemented.

Land: None at this stage.

Council Plan/BVPP Reference: None

Relevant statutory powers: There is a wide range of equalities legislation that would have a bearing on the proposals contained in this report.

Background papers: None

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: N/A.

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A.