



meeting      **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

date            **20 April 2009**                      agenda item number

## **Report of the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance**

### **Equalities Briefing**

#### **Purpose of this report**

1. To receive the second six monthly performance information briefing on achievement of the Equality Scheme: progress against the Equality Framework and issues relating to the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process

#### **Background**

2. In April 2008 the results of a strategic review of equalities issues, begun in May 2007, were published. The review concentrated on legal issues for the Council, especially Equality Impact Assessments, (formally called SDRs).
3. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on 15 September 2008 that the Committee should receive a 6 monthly performance information briefing on
  - achievement of the equality framework
  - progress against the equality scheme
  - any issues relating to the EqIA process
  - any other equality issues.

#### **Achievement of the Equality Scheme**

4. The Equality Scheme is constantly under review and is amended annually. It is linked very closely to the new IDeA Equality Framework – see below. A draft Equality Scheme 2009 – 2013 will be published following consultation later this year. The Council is also in the process of publishing a Corporate Equality Strategy that is currently in draft form.

## **The new IDeA Equality Framework**

5. Since the OSC Strategic Review of Equalities Issues was published in April 2008, the IDeA has replaced the Equality Standard with the IDeA Equality Framework. The final version of the new Framework was published in March 2009. The full version of the Framework is available at <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=9491107>.

In summary however there are five key areas of performance:

- Knowing your communities and equality mapping
  - Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
  - Community engagement and satisfaction
  - Responsive services and customer care
  - A modern and diverse workforce.
6. The Framework has three levels of achievement instead of the original Level 0 – Level 5. The three levels are:
    - Emerging - councils previously at Levels 0 , 1 or 2 will transfer into this level;
    - Achieving – councils previously at Level 3 will slot into this level
    - Excellent – councils already at Level 5.

For 2009 only, there is an extra category:

- Moving towards Excellence – councils previously at Level 4 and aiming for Level 5 will be placed here.

## **Progress towards the Equality Framework**

7. The Council is working towards validation of the “Achieving” level. The decision on when to be re-assessed will be made by Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) following recommendation by CEDSG. The new guidelines allow councils to declare a level of achievement following their own self assessment and become validated by the IDeA at a later date.
8. Milestones that the Council have been working towards since the last IDeA assessment in September 2007 include:
  - Equality in Procurement;
  - Outcomes from EqlAs to be included in business plans, and departments to be able to evidence service improvement as a direct result;
  - Publishing EqlAs on significant services (the IDeA listed these following the 2007 assessment) most of them are employment related;

- More Member involvement
- Clearer links between equality issues and wider strategies and partnerships, within documentation and working practice;
- Equality mapping of the communities the Council serves.

9. Some progress has been made in all of the above areas:

- **Procurement:** the equality lead in Corporate Services and the senior officer responsible for procurement are examining the issues and will report to CEDSG on 6 May 2009 with proposed actions to ensure compliance;
- **Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs):** on the 25 March 2009 the EqIA Quality Assurance group carried out a random monitoring exercise on recent equality impact assessments. There is clear evidence that the Council is becoming much more skilled at carrying out EqIAs. There are some service areas with excellent practice; they are including outcomes from EqIAs in business planning and the subsequent improvements to services are having a measurably improved output for Council customers, on the whole though there remains more work to be done in this area. Corporate Services have now completed their “risk assessment “ of EqIAs and this has been published within the council list, all relevant HR EqIAs are now included;
- **Elected Members:** Members are becoming more familiar with the scrutiny role for equality and many Members are more engaged and involved with equality issues generally. The Member Equality Champions also take their roles seriously. Equality and diversity compliance and scrutiny have been proposed for inclusion in the induction programme for the new administration;
- **Partnership and equality mapping;** some progress has been made to ensure that appropriate equality desegregation takes place and is monitored by relevant partnerships both externally and internally. A senior officer in the Chiefs Executives department is leading on this and will report to CEDSG on 6 July 2009.

### Issues relating specifically to Overview and Scrutiny Reviews

10. As the Strategic Review of Equalities highlighted, *Equality issues should be taken into account in all aspects of Overview and Scrutiny*. OSC are now actively addressing this by:

- amending the scoping process to ensure Members of OSC are aware of relevant equality impact assessments;
- questioning key witnesses on equality, diversity and social inclusion issues arising from the current review;

- identifying which Equality Impact Assessments relevant to the service being reviewed have already been carried out, ensuring the EqlAs represent fair practice and most importantly, recommending that EqlAs are carried out on the service under review in the future;
- ensuring that Cabinet have also considered equality issues and equality impact assessments and that Cabinet responses do not lead to discrimination or unfairness.

11. Progress is being made in all the above areas, however OSC could ask for EqlAs to be completed when conducting reviews. OSC could also seek the advice of the Corporate Equality Team when scoping reviews or formulating questions if it feels this would be helpful.

### **Cabinet**

12. Some progress has been made; many 2009 Cabinet reports now have reference to equality issues, some indicate how diversity issues have affected the decisions made and a few highlight how the decisions made will affect users of services. A small proportion mention EqlAs specifically.

### **Recommendations**

13. It is recommended that

- (i) the Corporate Equality Team make themselves available to provide expertise to assist Members when scoping reviews and preparing questions;
- (ii) the OSC should receive an update on progress against the new IDeA Equality Framework as part of future briefings.

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Background Papers nil