

EQUALITIES - PROGRESS REPORT

Report of the Chief Executive

Strategic Priorities: Safer and Prosperous City
Corporate Performance Objective: CI01,CI04

1. Why has the report come to the Committee

- 1.1 To consider the progress of the Council's equality agenda including achievement of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

2. Description of Decision

- 2.1 To consider the proposal, note progress and report back to Cabinet

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council is committed to removing unfair barriers and providing equality of opportunity in the way it delivers services and provides employment. It is also committed to promoting equality and positive relations wherever possible through its business and other activity. Doing this is a requirement of existing equality legislation and the Equality Standard for Local Government. The Council's approach to this is described within the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan and is managed through its Strategic Planning process. Equality is incorporated within the Sunderland Strategy as a cross-cutting issue.
- 3.2 The Council's equality policy framework currently consists of an overall Corporate Equality Scheme, and specific Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes, as required by existing law. There is also a Corporate Equality Action Plan which describes the steps the Council needs to take to meet the requirements of the Equality Standard.

4. Current Position

- 4.1 Level 4 of the Equality Standard requires the Council to have in place equality information and monitoring systems. This information needs to be adequate enough to measure the impact of services on different groups. The Council needs to review information currently being collected across services in relation to the six equality strands (race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and religion and belief), and put in place monitoring arrangements where gaps exist. Although considerable progress has been made with this work, the gathering and analysis of all the necessary information and has taken longer than expected and this has slightly delayed progress of the Council's Corporate Equality Action Plan.

- 4.2 The Equality Framework for Local Government was launched at the end of March and will supersede the existing Equality Standard. The associated assessment process will also change as the 5 levels of the Equality Standard will be replaced by 3 overall levels; Emerging, Achieving and Excellent. The Council has been assessed as having reached the 'Achieving' level of the Equality Framework and the existing Level 4 action plan will be adapted to form an action plan for achieving 'Excellent'.
- 4.3 The Single Equality Bill will soon become an act of parliament and will supersede all current existing equality legislation. Although the detail of this new Act is still emerging, it is certain that it will place extra responsibilities and requirements on the Council.
- 4.4 Progress against the Council's equality related performance indicators are reported annually in a separate report to the committee. Over and above this, actions within the Council's existing equality schemes are mainly progressing or complete. The only exceptions to this being in relation to the following actions within the Disability Equality Scheme:

- "Assess the feasibility of having new Council building or refurbishment plans checked by a qualified Disability Access Auditor to make sure plans meet the needs of the Disability Discrimination Act and not just building regulations".

This action is being progressed by Development and Regeneration and a report will be brought to the Review Committee in the future.

- "Review the Council's pricing policy for disabled people and their carers using Council facilities to make sure it complies with the Disability Discrimination Act."

We are working with City Treasurers to progress this and a report with findings and recommendations will be brought to the Review Committee in the future.

5 Single Equality Scheme

- 5.1 As previously reported, the Council now intends to combine its existing equality policies and develop a Single Equality Scheme. This is in line with the new Single Equality Bill. The changes will include bringing together and increasing the legal provision for a number of pieces of existing anti-discrimination and equality legislation covering the following Equality strands; race, gender (including transgender), disability, age, sexual orientation, and religion and belief. At a later point the Equality Bill will introduce a positive duty for all public sector organisations requiring proactive management and promoting of equality throughout all activity.
- 5.2 The Council has developed a consultation plan regarding the development of a Single Equality Scheme and is currently in the process of consulting relevant community groups and organisations. The Council plans to have a draft Single Equality Scheme prepared for later in the year.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 That the Review Committee accepts this report for information regarding progress against the Equality Standard and the newly launched Equality Framework.

Background Papers

Corporate Equality Scheme
Gender Equality Scheme
Disability Equality Scheme
Race Equality Scheme
The Equality Framework for Local Government

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