



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Planning, Policy and Improvement)

Executive Board

Date: 16th April 2008

Subject: Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008 - 2011

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In
(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to legislative requirements the Council's first Equality and Diversity Strategy was developed and approved in June 2006. Since this strategy was introduced there have been further legislative changes and areas for development of the Strategy plan have been identified.

The strategy was initially developed as a two year plan to enable future documents to align with other key council documents, such as, the Leeds Strategic Plan and the Council Business Plan. This report, therefore, recommends the approval of the Council's new Equality Scheme for the period 2008 – 11.

The new Equality Scheme builds on the earlier Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 08 and develops our approach further. In reviewing the 2006 Strategy there was learning which was taken forward, and has helped inform both the process used and the development of the document itself. The review of the 2006 strategy has included involvement by all key equality and diversity stakeholders and priorities identified by them have been used as the basis for the development of the action plan as a key part of the new Equality Scheme.

The new Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008 – 11 will ensure that we meet our current legal duties whilst also taking account of the direction of travel of future legislation.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 There is a complex legal framework for equality which places general and specific duties on the council within: employment; training; procurement; service delivery; leadership; involvement; communication and publishing activities. These include the production and publication of race, disability and gender equality schemes and there is a key legislative requirement to detail the authority's response to the duties to promote race, disability and gender equality.
- 1.2 In 2006, the Council produced its first Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006-08 to respond to these legal requirements and develop a strategic approach to delivering with equality and diversity issues. This Strategy has now been reviewed, in line with other key corporate documentation, and a new response developed.
- 1.3 A new single equality and diversity scheme reflects the statutory duties of the council under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006. It also takes account of the Council's responsibilities under other equality and diversity legislation.
- 1.4 This single equality and diversity Scheme incorporates our race, disability and gender equality schemes, hence why the new document is referred as our Equality and Diversity scheme, as opposed to a strategy.
- 1.5 This report sets out:
- An overview of the process used to review the current Strategy and develop the new scheme.
 - Highlights learning;
 - Introduces the new Equality Scheme 2008 -11; and
 - Seeks approval for the new Scheme.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 2008 was published in June 2006 and built on the principles and activities established within the previously published Race Equality Scheme. It broadened them to include all six equality areas covered by legislation i.e. race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age.
- 2.2 The strategy focused on the impact organisational barriers can have on a diverse population and identified practical ways of removing or reducing those barriers.
- 2.3 The strategy aimed to weave equality and diversity into the culture of the organisation in order to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination; and
 - Promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

2.2 In May 2007 a review was started with the intention of:

- Identifying areas for improving the strategic approach to equality and diversity;
- Identifying strategic equality and diversity priorities; and
- Involving representatives of all the relevant equality and diversity stakeholders in the development and implementation of the council's approach to equality and diversity for 2008 – 2011.

2.3 Before the review began, some areas for improvement had already been identified. These, along with some constructive criticism that had been received from individuals and groups on the approach that we had previously adopted, identified the need:

- To have clear evidence of specific priorities and targets for each equality area – race, disability, men, women, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age;
- To increase participation of interested groups both internal and external, in developing the strategy and supporting documents;
- To focus on outcomes – what difference is being made and to whom;
- To simplify the action plan and performance management of the strategy;
- To improve accountability and challenge of the council's progress; and
- Call the future strategy a “scheme” as this is how legislation describes what needs to be in place and is what people ask for when contacting the council.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Review

3.1 The new Equality Scheme 2008 – 11 builds on the good practice which was established within the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 08, and seeks to further embed equality and diversity throughout employment and service delivery.

3.2 The Scheme provides contextual information, priorities and includes a robust action plan. The action plan is based on the priorities identified by both communities of interest and by the council. It highlights those areas which are generic to a number of communities and those which are specific to some.

3.3 It sets out arrangements to performance manage the progress of the action plan within a clear accountability framework.

3.4 As part of the review process work took place to ensure that stakeholders would be involved in the development of the Scheme. This is in line with our legal duties under a range of equality and diversity legislation.

3.5 Alongside the considerable involvement with a wide range of stakeholders, desktop research has also taken place. This has involved an analysis of:

- Existing local and national research that has already been carried out;
- Corporate Assessment – initial findings from the Audit Commissions inspection carried out in December 2007;
- Existing anti-discrimination legislation;
- Changes being implemented to introduce a National Indicators set;
- Equalities Review – fairness and freedom. An independent review commissioned by the Prime Minister;
- Findings from the Residents Survey, and;
- Findings from the Staff Survey.

3.6 This scheme also demonstrates how our approach to equality goes beyond our statutory obligations and provides an indication of how we embed equality and diversity within all areas of operation.

3.7 An integral part of the scheme is the need to continue the involvement of the six equality communities in challenging and monitoring progress against the action plan. Work will take place to ensure that this happens.

4.0 Equality and Diversity Action Plan

4.1 The analysis of the priorities identified by communities of interest and individuals involved in the review and the development of the scheme highlighted that there were many common areas. These have been used to develop the following overarching priorities which have been divided into the following themed areas:

- Employment, training and development
- Safer communities
- Service delivery
- Participation and involvement
- Promotion of equality and diversity

4.2 Generally, priorities within these themes are similar for all equality areas: race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion and belief and age. However there are some priorities that are specific to particular equality areas. These have been identified in the action plan.

4.3 All of these outcomes and priorities have been matched to ensure that they support the delivery of the Leeds Strategic Plan and Council Business Plan draft improvement priorities.

4.4 The priorities in the action plan have been developed in partnership with services. It is specifically designed to ensure that both the priorities highlighted by the communities of interest and council equality priorities are reflected. It does not record all the activity taking place around equality and diversity, but shows the corporate approach and focuses on some service specific priorities which reflect identified priorities

4.5 The action plan will be formally monitored through the normal performance management framework. There will also be regular reports to the Corporate Leadership Team and to the lead Executive Board member with responsibility for Equality and Diversity.

6.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

6.1 The new Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008 – 11 supports the delivery of the improvement priorities in the Leeds Strategic Plan and the Council Business Plan

7.0 Legal And Resource Implications

7.1 There is a complex legal framework for equality which places general and specific duties on the council within: employment; training; procurement; service delivery; leadership; involvement; communication and publishing activity. The Equality Scheme 2008 – 11 meets these legal requirements.

8.0 Conclusions

8.1 The production and publication of the Equality Scheme 2008 – 11 will ensure that we meet our legal requirements and sets out the equality and diversity priorities for the council. It also works in synergy with other strategic documents, such as, the Leeds Strategic Plan, and Council Business Plan.

9.1 It provides an overarching corporate approach to equality and diversity which will further embed this within service delivery and employment

9.0 Recommendations

Executive Board is asked to:

- Note the content of this report
- Approve the Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008 – 2011 as attached at Appendix 1.