

**Statement of**

**Scrutiny Board (Central & Corporate Functions)**

**Embedding Equality,  
Diversity and Cohesion  
and Integration**

# Introduction



## Introduction

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. The new Equality Scheme builds on the earlier Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 08 and develops the City Council's approach further.
4. The 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.
5. On 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008 Executive Board approved the Scheme and resolved the following;

*"That the Equality and Diversity Scheme be referred to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration, with Overview and Scrutiny Committee being requested to monitor progress of the scheme against the action plan".*
6. On 14<sup>th</sup> July members of Scrutiny Board (Central & Corporate Functions), (the successor Board to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee) held a round table discussion with Equality Officers to discuss how best to positively respond to Executive Boards recommendations
7. Scrutiny Board Members also discussed an invitation from The Fair Play Partnership for a number of elected members to take part in a 'champions of Diversity' exercise. This will help to identify any skills and knowledge gaps in the areas of equality, diversity and cohesion and integration and result in a learning and development action plan to benefit all Members.
8. This report provides detail of the discussion held and puts forward a number of recommendations.

## Comments and Recommendations



1. The focus of our discussion was, *"how best can Scrutiny respond to Executive Board's resolution which is both meaningful, adds value and goes beyond merely keeping a watching brief"*
2. We were also keen to explore ways in which Members of Scrutiny could 'champion' equality, diversity and cohesion and integration issues and to make the Scheme a living document with real relevance.
3. We are acutely aware that for many elected members (and officers) the whole equality and diversity agenda is either a bit of a mystery in terms of translating theory into practice or worse, an imposition and a box that needs to be ticked.
4. Our starting point therefore was to understand what the Council was trying to achieve.
5. The Equality and Diversity Scheme identifies themed areas:
  - Employment, training and development
  - Safer communities
  - Service delivery
  - Participation and involvement
  - Promotion of equality and diversity
6. We were told that generally, priorities within these themes are similar for all equality areas: race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age. However there are some priorities that are specific to particular equality areas.
7. We were also told that the priorities in the action plan have been developed following a lengthy consultation and involvement exercise with communities, partners and colleagues within the council. We acknowledge that the action plan 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 priorities identified by communities.
8. It quickly became clear to us that the action plan was not and *should* not be the sole responsibility of one directorate or of one political portfolio. It is our view that equality and diversity is the responsibility of all elected members and all officers. Like the Council's Core Values, equality and diversity should be embedded in all that we do.
9. In Scrutiny terms, the action plan within the scheme is relevant to

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all Scrutiny Board remits. It is our view that all Scrutiny Boards have a role in monitoring the achievements against the plan.

10. Whilst it may be appropriate and entirely proper for a Scrutiny Board to undertake a specific inquiry into a particular element of the action plan, we are of the view that to really embed equality, diversity and cohesion and integration issues into our daily work it is essential to uphold the principles of equality and diversity throughout the Scrutiny process.
11. We recommend that each Inquiry undertaken by a Scrutiny Board has within its terms of references specific reference to how and to what effect consideration has been given to the impact of a service or policy on equality, diversity and cohesion and integration issues.
12. For example, this Scrutiny Board has recently agreed Terms of Reference for an Inquiry into the commissioning of services. Within the Terms of Reference is a commitment to consider; *How organisations commissioned to deliver services meet the duties within relevant equality legislation*. This is a specific action within the Leeds Equality & Diversity Scheme 2008 – 2011.
13. In other areas of Scrutiny work Members will have the opportunity to inquire into the impact of a decision, policy or service delivery on any disadvantaged group.
14. We would also recommend that the outcome of the Scrutiny Boards' work should reflect, where appropriate, the question of how a decision, policy or service delivery has a positive, neutral or negative affect. The Board's final report at the end of an inquiry (or other item of work undertaken by the Scrutiny Board) should make reference, as appropriate, to the Board's comments or recommendations in this regard. This will also include, where appropriate, comments in relation to decisions and the impact on groups.
15. By adopting this approach Members would also be addressing a key action identified within the Council's *Cohesion and Integration priorities delivery plan 2008 – 2010*.
16. We recommend that the Scrutiny Advisory Group discuss the merits of these proposals and if supportive recommend to the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) the inclusion of an appropriate Scrutiny Board Procedure Guidance Note within the Council's Constitution

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## Recommendation 1

**That the Scrutiny Advisory Group consider the incorporation of equality, diversity and cohesion and integration issues within the scrutiny process and request the drafting of an appropriate Scrutiny Guidance Note for inclusion within the Council's Constitution.**

17. As with the work of Scrutiny, we believe that the consideration of equality, diversity and cohesion and integration issues should be embedded in all areas of the Council's work and should be the responsibility of all. This includes decision takers.
18. We are aware of the existence of Impact assessments and the way in which they can help to embed equality, diversity and cohesion and integration considerations into the council's decision making process. We are less aware however about how robustly they are used to inform officer delegated decisions or Executive Board decisions.
19. Whilst we would want impact assessments to inform the decision making process we are acutely aware of the need for proportionality and to avoid the process being a 'tick box'

exercise, (a concern we raised in our introduction), any process adopted must be effective, appropriate to the type and level of decision to be taken and non bureaucratic.

19. We recommend therefore that the Head of Equalities in conjunction with Directorates and Governance Services develops a realistic and deliverable approach to incorporating impact assessments into the council's decision making process.
20. We acknowledge that this will take time to develop and therefore request that officers report back to this Scrutiny Board in April 2009.

## Recommendation 2

**That the Head of Equalities develops a realistic and deliverable approach to incorporating impact assessments into the council's decision making process and report back to this Scrutiny Board in April 2009.**

## Fair Play

21. Leeds City Council has signed up with the Fair Play Partnership who will work with Elected Members to develop their

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knowledge, understanding and future role in driving forward the Equality and Diversity agenda.

22. There has been equality and diversity training in place for Elected Members for several years. However, the most recent ethical audit, presented to the Member Development Working Group, highlighted equality training for Elected Members as an improvement area. In addition it is also an action in the Equality and Diversity Scheme 2008-2011 and will support our accreditation to Level 4 of the Equality Standard by December 2008.
23. Fair Play (who are an independent not for profit organisation) have received funding to deliver their programme of training from Yorkshire Forward. Leeds is the only local authority to be invited to take part. The other organisations come from a range of sectors which include:
- The Rugby Football League
  - Northern Rail
  - Accent Group
  - East North East Homes
  - Frank Haslam Milan
  - Connaught
  - First Direct
  - Pennine Housing
24. There will be an initial analysis of understanding and knowledge of

equality and diversity using a process developed by the Fair Play Partnership which is intended to help assess strengths and areas for improvement around the themes of leadership, people, policy and strategy and partnerships and resources

25. Given the role members of this Scrutiny Board potentially have in terms of both championing equality and diversity issues and their role in monitoring the Council's performance in this area, we feel it appropriate that members of this board should sign up to take part in the training offered by Fair Play. We believe the development of a core of expertise with Scrutiny would be invaluable in helping us fulfil our role.

### Recommendation 3

**That Members of Scrutiny Board (Central and Corporate Functions) commit to undertaking the equality and diversity assessment and training provided by the Fair Play Partnership.**