



Report of the Chief Officer, Executive Support

Executive Board

Date: 14 June 2006

Subject: Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 - 2008

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic minorities

Women

Disabled people

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

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

Executive Summary

Changes to the Corporate Performance Assessment have provided a greater focus on diversity issues. User focus, diversity and human rights are integral elements of the corporate assessment. These judgments influence each theme score and therefore make a significant contribution to the overall assessment score.

Leeds City Council's Race Equality Scheme 2002-2005 was produced in line with the general and specific duties arising from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Since the establishment of the Race Equality Scheme, a range of new equality legislation has been introduced.

Since 2004 new employment and partnership legislation introduced has given some rights to equality strands not previously covered and introduces similar duties for disability and gender as introduced for race.

In order to comply with existing and emerging legislation, achieve our mission and meet our core values on Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 2008. This strategy has been produced to build on the Race Equality Scheme and includes gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 - 2008 by Executive Board prior to the launch event on Thursday 29 June 2006.
- 1.2 This report provides background information, outlines the process undertaken in the development of the strategy and outlines how the strategy will be monitored and evaluated.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 There is considerable focus at present on the equality and diversity agenda. There are a number of primary drivers which includes the Corporate Performance Assessment, Local Area Agreements and the increasingly complex legislative framework.
- 2.2 Changes to the Corporate Performance Assessments have provided a greater focus on diversity issues. The corporate assessment has become more challenging in that it will:
- Include an explicit judgment of the quality and impact of the council's efforts to promote user focus and diversity;
 - Assess how well the council contributes to the achievement and shared priorities between local and central government while understanding and meeting the needs of its local communities;
 - Include, within the key lines of enquiry, more explicit consideration of management and resources and the value for money when reaching judgments about capacity;
 - Assess the performance of the council in leading and influencing communities, local partnerships and other local agencies, with a focus on what difference councils are making to local people.
- 2.3 User focus, diversity and human rights will be integral elements of the corporate assessment. These judgments will influence each theme score and therefore make a significant contribution to the overall assessment score.
- 2.4 Leeds City Council's Race Equality Scheme 2002-2005 was produced in line with the general and specific duties arising from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Since the establishment of the Race Equality Scheme, a range of new legislation has been introduced:
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation and Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
 - Gender Recognition Act 2004
 - Civil Partnerships Act 2004
 - Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which includes similar general and specific duties to those of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and promotes equality for disabled people in the public sector.
 - Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

- 2.5 The Equality Act 2006 will create a single equality and human rights body and extends the prohibition on religious and sexual orientation discrimination to the provision of goods and services, planning, education and the exercise of public functions. The act also introduces on public sector bodies the duty to promote gender equality and extends the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to cover the provision of public functions.
- 2.6 In order to comply with legislation, inspections, achieve our mission and meet our core values, we need to appreciate the diversity of Leeds by celebrating the value of different communities, cultures and religions by tackling discrimination.
- 2.7 The Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006-2008, builds on the existing Race Equality Scheme and broadens to include other equality strands – gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age.

3.0 Development of the Equality and Diversity Strategy

- 3.1 In April 2005, the Equality and Community Cohesion Champions Board approved the process and approach for developing the strategy. The Equality Team have led the development of the strategy and co-ordinated an inter-departmental steering group.
- 3.2 Consultation of the draft strategy was undertaken between early February and the end of April 2006. A range of materials was produced to engage with as wide a representation as possible and these were distributed internally across the council including members, and externally through the council's consultation forums, the voluntary, community and faith sector and the Core Cities Performance Management and Equality Network.
- 3.3 The draft strategy was also sent to the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) and the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). Feedback from the commissions has been disappointing. The CRE and DRC have responded that they do not comment on individual documents. The EOC whilst unable to allocate time to comment on the strategy content, do support our approach.
- 3.4 Feedback to the strategy has generally been very positive, particularly in relation to the style of the strategy and how equality and diversity issues are brought together.
- 3.5 Comments and contributions from the consultation process have been used to improve the strategy in particular the action plan. The strategy has also been checked against the general and specific legislative duties to ensure we are able to demonstrate how we will meet these.
- 3.6 Following approval of the strategy by Executive Board, a formal launch event will be held at the end of June 2006. This launch will be a celebration of equality and diversity including achieving level 3 of the Equality Standard.

4.0 Monitoring and evaluation of the Equality and Diversity Strategy

- 4.1 It is essential that actions within the strategy are monitored and reviewed to show progress across the council and to highlight future priorities. The strategy is supported by a detailed action plan that outlines corporate and departmental actions. The Equality and Community Cohesion Champions Board have agreed:
- To take on the monitoring role of specific actions within the strategy;

- Reporting mechanisms are linked to existing performance management frameworks; and
- Linkages are made to the Community Cohesion Action Plan and progression of the Equality Standard.

4.2 The Equality Team are developing guidance that will help departments to track their progress and activity that links to general and specific legislative duties.

4.3 We have a legal obligation to publish our progress. An annual position statement will be published showing our progress on actions with the Equality and Diversity Strategy, against our targets and indicators and within departmental action plans.

4.4 The Corporate Management Team have approved the strategy and made recommendations to:

- Improve the link with the detailed action plan for the equality and diversity objectives;
- Strengthen accountability to our communities;
- Include bolder outcomes within the action plan; and
- Explain what we are doing in relation to community cohesion.

4.5 Leader Management Team have approved the strategy, agreed to receive equality and diversity updates twice a year and requested details of the launch event.

5.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

5.1 The Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 2008 incorporates the Equal Opportunities Policy and broadens our approach to equality and diversity to ensure that we meet our legal duties.

6.0 Legal and Resource Implications

6.1 The Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 -2008 will ensure that we meet our legal obligations under the current and emerging legislative framework.

7.0 Recommendations

Executive Board is asked to:

- Note the content of this report
- Approve the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2006 – 2008
- Receive specific equality and diversity updates twice a year