



COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Committee Report

Public

Date of Meeting: 8th June 2006

Title: EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

Report of: Head of Policy and Performance

Report reference: PPP23/06

Summary:

Presents a draft Equality and Diversity Policy for the comments of the Committee. In addition, it provides the Executive Summary and Recommendations from the report "Diversity in the Districts – Diagnostic Report for Carlisle City Council on the Equality Standard for Local Government".

Recommendations:

To approve the suggestion that Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider their response to the draft policy once the findings from the community consultation are available.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. Introduction

Executive report SP17/06 presented a draft Equality and Diversity Policy for consultation with community groups and Community Overview and Scrutiny. The draft (attached as Appendix 1) was referred at that meeting of the Executive for Overview and Scrutiny comments.

The presentation of the report was the first stage in a process, which will hopefully lead to the adoption of an Equality and Diversity Policy for the Council. Currently there are a number of employment policies that cover equality of opportunity, but there is little that focuses on the activities of the Council as a community leader and service provider.

2. Consultation

Before adopting such a policy the Council has a duty to consult with community groups and representatives. Officers have begun to draw together an approach to the consultation and a questionnaire. The questionnaire will seek views on the content of the draft policy and ask questions which have arisen from the Trinity Impact Assessment pilot.

It is anticipated that this consultation may take several months to complete. Rather than comment at this stage, **it is suggested that the committee wait for the outcome of this consultation before giving its recommendations.**

3. Diversity in the Districts – A Diagnostic Report for Carlisle City Council on the Equality Standard for Local Government

Carlisle City Council was selected earlier this year to take part in stage 2 of Government sponsored programme “Diversity in the Districts”. The purpose of the programme is to assist Local Authorities move through the levels of the Equality Standard for Local Government. Virginia Branney, a consultant with Dialog, was appointed to examine Carlisle’s progress against the standard and to identify the action necessary to move to the next level of the standard. A copy of the Executive Summary and recommendations from the final report is attached at Appendix 2.

The Equality Standard for Local Government provides a framework for improving the Council’s approach to equalities and diversity, so the consultant’s report is largely technical in nature. However, it does confirm that the Council is on target to report at level 1 of the standard for 2005/06 and that the targets for achieving levels 2 and 3 are realistic. The recommendations for action will be written into the Equalities and Diversity Project Plan an update of which will be brought to the next meeting of the committee for its consideration.



DIAGNOSTIC REPORT FOR CARLISLE CITY COUNCIL ON THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Executive summary

1. This report sets out the findings of an assessment by DIALOG of progress being made by Carlisle City Council in implementing the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG). (The report is largely technical and has been written primarily for officers.)
2. The Council is on target to be able to report as having attained Level 1 of the Standard for 2005-06. (There are only a few outstanding queries re possible gaps in meeting the evidence requirements which should not be difficult to address).
3. The 2007-08 target for the achievement of Level 2 is demanding but not unrealistic provided that the impact assessment programme is being rolled out across the Council. The target date for the achievement of Level 3 is end of 2008-09.
4. The ESLG is a performance standard for equalities and diversity. It provides a framework for incorporating equalities and diversity within service delivery, policy making and planning and employment in local authorities – in other words, it is intended to mainstream equalities and diversity across all equality strands.
5. The Standard is designed to help ensure that Council services are user-focussed and accessible to all. Implementing the Standard will help the Council to act on Audit Commission recommendations to improve accessibility of services.
6. The Standard is also designed to help ensure that the Council is a non-discriminatory and fair employer.
7. The Equality Standard for Local Government is a corporate health BVPI (Best Value Performance Indicator). For 2004-05, 21% of district councils in England reported as being at 'Level 0'. 59% reported as having attained Level 1. 15% reported at Level 2 and only 4.2% reported at Level 3.
8. There were many examples given of work in progress within the Council which demonstrate that commitment to improving performance on equalities and diversity is being translated into action. However, it was not apparent that there was a clear

understanding of the role the Standard can play as a focus and a framework for making progress on equalities.

9. The Council has taken forward its work on equalities in recent years and generally there is a greater appreciation of the relevance of equality and diversity issues to the authority and the locality, among employees and councillors. There is commitment and a drive from the top of the organisation. However, it was not felt that the authority had a clear or explicit vision on equalities, particularly at a political level.
10. The leadership may be missing opportunities to publicly reinforce its commitment to progress equalities and diversity and challenge prejudice. Highly visible statements of the Council's position can send a powerful message about its values and intentions.
11. For reporting on BVPI 2a, the authority must report on the ESG Level it has attained across the whole authority and only the lowest Level across all directorates/service areas can be reported as the whole authority Level.
12. The authority recognises that equality awareness is an area for improvement and has embarked on a three-year training programme. It is also intended to build equality competences into performance appraisal. These measures will help to provide staff with the skills to deliver services more effectively and to mainstream good equalities practice.
13. The report sets out the key requirements of Levels 1 and 2 of the Standard.
14. The Executive has recently adopted a Comprehensive Equality Policy. This will be subject to community consultation. Suggestions are made by the consultant to strengthen the Policy in light of the requirements of Level 1 of the Standard.
15. At Level 1, the authority must make a corporate commitment to develop a Corporate Equality Action Plan (CEP). It is intended to use the recommendations of this report as a basis for drafting the Action Plan.
16. Under the Standard, resources must be identified and earmarked for improving equality practice. This is a key Level 1 commitment.
17. In summary, to attain Level 2, there must be evidence that the Level 1 commitments are starting to translate into action.
18. Engagement with Impact Needs/Requirements Assessment (INRA) is a key requirement of Level 2 under the Service Delivery and Customer Care theme.

19. The Council is working with Trinity Developments to pilot impact assessment. The pilot encompasses disability, age, gender, sexual orientation and religion/belief as well as racial equality. This is very helpful in light of ESLG requirements and new and forthcoming statutory responsibilities in relation to the other equality strands.
20. The Equalities Report to the Executive SPO1/06 recognises that impact assessment cannot simply be done at corporate level 'on behalf' of directorates or service areas and that the Council will need people in each service area who can advise and support the process. A learning point from other authorities is that the task should not be given to an individual officer but to a small team.
21. The process must be capable of encompassing needs impact assessment as well as statutorily based impact assessment for gender and disability as well as race equality.
22. Difficulties have been encountered at the secondary stage of the pilot in regard to consultation with service users particularly from ethnic minority groups. It has been noted that additional resources may have to be identified, at least initially, to improve the Council's local contacts.
23. It is important that the contribution that frontline staff and union representatives can make to giving feedback and suggestions on users' experiences of service delivery and overcoming barriers to access is not overlooked in planning to implement the consultation elements of Level 2.
24. The Standard includes specific requirements in relation to procurement and partnership arrangements. The launching of a new Local Strategic Partnership and the development of a new Community Plan provide an excellent opportunity to agree and articulate a shared vision on equalities and diversity and to ensure that a mainstreaming approach is taken.
25. This assessment indicates that the Council meets the employment and training elements of Level 1. Assuming that the Pay and Workforce Strategy is implemented in line with the planned timescale, the authority should not have difficulty in producing evidence of achievement of the Level 2 employment and training elements for 2006-07.

Recommendations

1. It is important that ESLG implementation is visibly led and supported by the leadership of the authority i.e. the Chief Executive, the Senior Management Team, the Leader and the Executive Committee. There also needs to be a clear understanding amongst all the Council's employees and councillors as to why equalities and diversity are important in the context of Carlisle City.
2. All elected members should have information and briefing on the Standard and why Carlisle is committed to achieving it. Executive and Community Overview and Scrutiny members should have the opportunity to acquire more in-depth knowledge given their responsibilities.
3. All directorate/ service area managers should have a good understanding of the purpose of the Standard and the main requirements of the five Levels, as well as their role in implementing it. Basic information on the Standard should also be available to all employees.
4. As a priority, it is recommended that an ESLG Steering Group is set up, with representation from each directorate. The Steering Group should have authority to make decisions which will be binding on directorates, apart from decisions that would normally require approval at Senior Management Team /Executive level.
5. There should be a common methodology for self-assessment across the authority and the results of self-assessment at directorate level (encompassing service areas) need to be checked and validated by the proposed ESLG Steering Group.
6. If equality champions are to be retained, thought needs to be given to formalising their role and remit. It will need to be recognised by line managers that equality champions will need to be supported to undertake their role in addition to the 'day job'.
7. The process of self-assessment against the Standard will make a call on resources in directorates and some time will need to be dedicated to checking compliance against the elements of the Levels and supplying evidence of compliance.
8. The equality champions might form a 'sounding board' for the Steering Group, along with representatives from community groups and other interested parties.
9. It is recommended that Carlisle investigates setting up a network of ESLG lead officers within Cumbria district councils (and possibly others) that have adopted the Standard, to share best practice and act as a sounding board for implementation issues. Elected members

might also welcome the opportunity to liaise with colleagues who are similarly active on equality issues.

10. If separate Equality Schemes are to be produced, planned activities and target dates should be cross-referenced to relevant elements of the ESLG, because action taken to meet the Schemes' requirements will also meet the evidence requirements of a range of ESLG elements in relation to race, disability and gender equality. High level actions to be taken should be included in the Corporate Equality Action Plan.
11. It will be important to brief service heads on the content of the ESLG; what will be required of their service areas to deliver on the CEP and how this should translate into individual employees' work plans. It is suggested that guidance is prepared and agreed by the proposed ESLG Steering Group (to be issued as part of guidance on service planning).
12. To successfully implement the ESLG, particularly at Level 2 and above, there need to be mechanisms in place to ensure that corporate objectives on equalities (including ESLG requirements) are translated into directorate and service area objectives within their service plans. Outcomes at directorate/service area level must be capable of being monitored. The fact that Carlisle has adopted a performance management framework is an asset in regard to ESLG implementation.
13. To ensure that the relevant requirements of Level 2 are met, it is recommended that the published guidance on ESLG implementation is taken into account in drafting the Corporate Equality Action Plan.
14. In rolling out impact assessment across the authority, it is recommended that the proposed ESLG Steering Group monitors the coverage and timetabling of INRAs in directorates and checks that cross-cutting service areas are being picked up.
15. As some key strategies and services are planned on a Cumbria-wide basis, it may be appropriate to undertake the relevant INRAs on a cross-agency basis.
16. Statutorily based impact assessment should be integrated and coordinated within the INRA process. Care must be taken to ensure impact assessments conform to regulatory provisions and relevant Codes of Practice in terms of their scope, timetables for action and review and reporting/publication requirements.
17. It may be valuable for the ESLG Steering Group to contact other authorities with small minority populations that have used imaginative and successful approaches to consultation.

18. It will be essential to develop information and monitoring systems and the Corporate Equality Action Plan will need to set out how this will be done.