

Agenda Item No: **Report No:**
Report Title: **Equality Standard for Local Government**
Report To: **Cabinet** **Date:** **17 October 2007**
Lead Councillor: **Councillor Jon Freeman**
Ward(s) Affected: **All**
Report By: **Chief Executive**
Contact Officer(s): **Jackie Gavigan, Equalities Co-ordinator**

Purpose of Report:

To give an update on the progress of the Council's equalities work.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 To note the progress towards achieving Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 1 To enable the Council to complete its programme of work to achieve Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Information

- 2 The Equality Standard for Local Government is a comprehensive framework for mainstreaming equalities into policy-making, service delivery and employment, thereby ensuring that discriminatory barriers which prevent equal access can be identified and removed. The Equality Standard for Local Government has five levels of achievement and each level has four areas of equality activity.

Local authorities assess their progress based on:

Level 1: Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy

Level 2: Assessment and consultation

Level 3: Setting equality objectives and targets

Level 4: Information systems and monitoring against targets

Level 5: Achieving and reviewing outcomes

- 3 The areas of equality activity are in:

- Leadership and corporate commitment

- Consultation, community development and scrutiny
- Service delivery and customer care
- Employment and training.

4 The Council has achieved Level 1 and is currently working towards Level 2.

Best Value Performance Indicator (2a)

5 The level of the Equality Standard to which authorities conform is measured by Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI 2a) against which local authorities are expected to provide evidence of their progress.

6 The Equality Standard helps us to meet our obligations under the law in a way that is appropriate to local circumstance, integrates equality policies and objectives with BVPIs and provides a framework for improving performance over time.

Progress towards Level 2 of the Equality Standard

7 Level 2 is concerned with measuring the equality needs and requirements in service delivery and employment in our community. A major step towards achieving Level 2 is the successful implementation and completion of a programme of equality assessments.

8 Equality assessments involve a systematic review of all our policies, strategies and procedures to identify their likely effect on different groups in the community in order to mitigate any disadvantage.

9 Equality assessments have been carried out on all relevant policies and service areas and are listed in **Appendix 1**. Frontline services were prioritised as these have the most immediate impact on the public. Assessments will continue to be conducted for all new and amended policies and services as they are developed.

10 An improvement plan for corporate actions arising from the assessments is contained in **Appendix 3**. Action plans for individual departments will shortly be available on the Council's website.

Final Steps towards achieving Level 2

11 In addition to the equality assessment work, a Level 2 monitoring report (see **Appendix 2**) is used by the Equalities Working Group to enable evidence to be gathered and achievements measured in the 4 areas of equality activity required under the Standard.

12 Work remaining for the completion of Level 2 is:

- Publish equality assessment results and action plans and invite comments via the Council's website.
- Conduct any appropriate consultation on assessment findings with our equality partners and stakeholder groups.

- Develop internal guidance on partnership working which incorporates equality objectives.
- Complete the equality assessment of the Local Labour Market Area.
- Conduct an internal audit on evidence of completed Level 2 work.

13 The Council aims to have all the evidence in place for self-assessment and achieving Level 2 by March 2008.

Financial Appraisal

14 The cost of consultation arising from the equality assessments will be met within existing budgets. There will be a cost in staff time.

Environmental Implications

15 I have completed the Environmental Implications questionnaire and this Report is exempt from the requirement because it is a progress report.

Risk Management Implications

16 I have completed a risk assessment in accordance with the Council's Risk Management methodology and have identified that the main risk of not complying with the Standard is that the Council could fail its audit requirements and attract criticism from the Audit Commission. We will avoid this by adhering to the requirements and measurement criteria at each level of the Equality Standard.

Background Papers

17 The Equality Standard for Local Government framework document
Equality Assessment guidance and proformas

Appendices

18 Appendix 1 - Equality Assessments Programme
Appendix 2 - Equality Standard Level 2 Monitoring Report
Appendix 3 – Equality Assessments Corporate Action Plan