

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

7TH OCTOBER 2009

DIVERSITY PEER CHALLENGE

Responsible Portfolio Holder	Cllr Geoff Denaro
Responsible Head of Service	Claire Felton
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 In April 2009 the Council invited a Diversity Peer Challenge to test our claim to have reached Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. The Peer Challenge Team confirmed that they supported the self assessment made by the Council and agreed that the Council has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This has now automatically migrated across to Level 2 Achieving, of the Equality Framework for Local Government which replaced the Equality Standard on 1st April 2009.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the report and accept the recommendations made by the Diversity Peer Challenge Report and the measures identified to address the issues therein.

3. BACKGROUND

Leadership and corporate commitment

- 3.1 The peer challenge looked closely at the way in which the Equality Champions meetings were working and the way in which they fitted into the wider Equality agenda for the Council. Although it was acknowledged that the Champions Group had worked to date, there was also a feeling that it needed to evolve and be empowered to drive the equality and diversity agenda forward to the next level.
- 3.2 The report questions whether the group is fit for purpose moving forward and encourages the Council to consider raising the profile of the current Group through the revision of the terms of reference, to consider making the group more strategic and to consider extending the membership to include the Portfolio Holder.
- 3.3 As an organisation the Council does not agree with all of these comments and at the meeting of the Corporate Management Team (CMT) on 21st July 2009 proposals were made in relation to the changes needed and as a result the Equality Officer has incorporated these proposals into a revised draft terms of reference which is at appendix 1 to this report for comment and discussion – In particular the need for the Champions Group to play a part in equality impact assessments.

- 3.4 CMT felt it was more appropriate to develop an Impact Assessment Steering Group operating on the same lines as the current Risk Management Group to monitor the quality and consistency of completed Impact Assessments. This would ensure that the appropriate level of officer had an involvement in the impact assessment process thereby delivering the requirements within the Peer Challenge without affecting the ability of more junior staff to be involved at the Champion level.
- 3.5 The Peer review, whilst recognising the enormous journey that the Council has made in relation to Equality and Diversity was anxious that the Council continue its progress and momentum, particularly with the move to the Equality Framework.
- 3.6 In order for us to do this the Council needs to address the issue of setting targets for age, religion/belief and sexual orientation as there has been little visible progress in this area to date.
- 3.7 It is recognised that this is a challenge nationally; nevertheless it is an area that is deemed to be essential in the movement from 'achieving' to 'excellent' within the framework.
- 3.8 It is therefore proposed that the Equality Officer make investigations of other authorities who have incorporated these targets within their operational business and determine how this can be achieved effectively at Bromsgrove District Council. It must also be an area that we agree with our key partners and County colleagues where possible in order to ensure a consistency of service delivery throughout Bromsgrove and the wider County.
- 3.9 Another area that we must now focus on is the provision of a data monitoring system and the ability to accurately identify who our customers are currently and where we are failing to reach certain groups of our community.
- 3.10 A small sub group of CMT members has been meeting to determine the most appropriate way for the Council to proceed and it is anticipated that a robust data monitoring system will be available to all departments by the end of the financial year.
- 3.11 This will enable us to capture vital information in relation to the customers currently using our services and it will enable us to more easily identify where there are any equality service deliver gaps. Once these gaps are identified positive remedial action can be considered and implemented where appropriate to ensure that our services are as accessible as they can be.
- 3.12 Annually Service Heads identify the areas of business that they will develop through their key deliverables and data monitoring will provide further contextual information that can be used in conjunction with the data already captured through the Labour Market Assessment. This will enhance this process and result in a more effective business planning process.
- 3.13 The review acknowledged the historical involvement of the Equality and Diversity Forum and Disabled Users Group in the Council's Scrutiny agenda and highlighted the need for this to be continued, specifically encouraging the need for the Board to be

proactive when looking at equality and diversity issues and monitoring equality and diversity data.

- 3.14 Cabinet is advised that the Portfolio Holder for Legal Equalities and Democratic Services is now a member of the Equality and Diversity Forum and that he meets regularly with the Chairman to discuss current issues.
- 3.15 In addition it is now a Compulsory element on the member training and development programme that members regularly attend Equality and Diversity training to support them and to ensure that they are fully briefed on the Council's.
- 3.16 In support of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process the Council has invested in a dedicated Scrutiny Officer and additional Committee Services Officer to ensure that the Scrutiny process is developed in accordance with the Council's priorities moving forward. Officers appointed into these roles will have targets and objectives to ensure that the Scrutiny environment is supported to this extent and to the extent that members are encouraged to reflect on the Equality and Diversity duties and agenda when determining their Scrutiny programme.
- 3.17 Finally in this category the review acknowledged the enormous amount of work that has been done in the context of disability equality; however Elected Members need to be more visible in their commitment to all six strands of equality within the communities of Bromsgrove

Community engagement and accountability

- 3.18 The review identified the Equality and Diversity Forum as an area of good practice and recommended that the Council continue its efforts to positively encourage young people to get involved.
- 3.19 In this regard the forum are looking at ways in which younger people can become involved although it is recognised that there are other areas within the Council where younger people are actively involved in the decision making process and that these may not have been adequately articulated to the Peer assessors during the process of review.
- 3.20 The Council needs to look more closely at the needs of new migrant communities and the ways in which their needs can be supported through the deliver of Council services.
- 3.21 In this regard the Equality Officer will work with colleagues from the County through the provision of the purpose built site within the district to ensure that we are developing this area of the agenda.
- 3.22 Another nationally recognised area of challenge is the development of more positive publicity for LGBT issues within the community.
- 3.23 Cabinet is advised that the Equality and Diversity Forum were successful in their bid for funding to set up a group dedicated to this purpose in the budgeting round of

2008/9. This work continues and further funding has been obtained by the Council through the Being Different Together project to support this programme of activity.

- 3.24 It is hoped that this work will enable the Council to establish a community based group which will support the Equality and Diversity Forum and the wider Council in understanding and tackling some of the issues faced by members of our LGB and T community through support as community leaders and more inclusive service provision.

Service delivery and customer care

- 3.25 The report identified that there is limited collection of monitoring information about who is or is not using services. Target setting needs to be based on better quantitative data. This will inform service planning and monitoring of progress against targets.
- 3.26 This report identifies in the early part how this is being addressed through an group of officers from CMT and the fact that it is anticipated that a process will be in place by the end of the financial year to redress this.
- 3.27 The report identifies that the Council should revisit the tendering threshold to attract a wider range of suppliers and that it should provide more opportunities to promote the Council's message to attract a bigger pool of companies.
- 3.28 It is recognised that much work has already been done in this area by the Council's procurement officer through the provision of funds received through a historical capacity building fund grant. The Equality Officer and the Procurement Officer will work together to provide a more robust programme of activity to address this moving forward.
- 3.29 In addition ongoing contract monitoring should be undertaken to ensure compliance with equality clauses and the Equality Officer is working with the Legal Department to determine how this might be achieved.

Employment and Training

- 3.30 This is an area where the Council recognised that it would need to improve particularly in relation to workforce monitoring at all stages of employment. This data needs to be used to inform targets and actions in particular, work needs to start on sexual orientation and religion/belief.
- 3.31 The Council is encouraged to work towards inclusion in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and to develop closer relationships should be established with Trade Unions on furthering the equality agenda.
- 3.32 The Council is encouraged to take all necessary action to address the issues raised in the staff survey. CMT will need to look very carefully at the issues identified when embarking on their business planning cycle to ensure that these issues are captured and managed appropriately.

- 3.33 The report acknowledged the areas within the Equality and Diversity agenda that had been reported over the last two years, but more could be done to celebrate success. This is recognised by the Council as a whole and work continues through the Corporate Policy Department and the relationship management of the local media to address this issue.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 An Equalities budget already exists which is an can be used to fund the community activities and engagement that will support the continuing achievement and move towards Level 3 of the Equality Framework for Local Government over the next two years.
- 4.2 Most of the recommendations are either already being addressed or can be addressed in the next few months within existing activities using existing resources and extra resources that have been available to the Council through the Being Different Together project (includes training in the Equality Framework for Local Government from the IDeA and £8,000 for community projects to be delivered and completed by end of December 2009).

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Implementing the recommendations of the Diversity Peer Challenge will ensure that we have evidence to demonstrate compliance with all current Equality legislation and will assist with the work required to implement the forthcoming Equality Bill (expected June 2011).

6. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

- 6.1 All the work under the Diversity Peer Challenge and the Equality Framework for Local Government supports the Council's Corporate Improvement and Sense of Community objectives. The Council recognises the need to ensure that the needs of the customer are understood and addressed when delivering services.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The main risks associated with the details included in this report are:
- It will take time to review the Council's approach to equality which was formulated according to the Equality Standard for Local Government which was very much based on procedures and suited a "tick box" approach. The Council's success with the Diversity Peer Challenge was strong because there was strong evidence of outcomes as well as process and procedure.
 - The Equality Framework for Local Government has divided measurement into five main areas rather than four (as for the Standard) and although there is a general overlap, they are not exactly the same, therefore all staff and managers involved need time to make the transition.

- As always, there is a risk of lack of ownership and the Council must recognise that not all service departments are at the same level. Therefore time needs to be spent focusing effort where not all elements of the Standard/ Framework have been implemented as robustly as other areas.
- The risk is that if these issues are not addressed and acted upon, the Council could lose its Achieving status when it comes up for re-assessment in 2011.
- Equally, if being assessed for Excellent in 2011 the issues above have not been addressed, the Council may retain Achieving but not acquire Excellent which is the stated objective.

7.2 These risks are being managed as follows:

Risk Register: *Legal, Equalities and Democratic Services*
 Key Objective Ref No: 1
 Key Objective: *Effective Equalities Culture*

8. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The Council operates an Community lead Equalities and Diversity Forum and Disabled User Group. These groups bring together the community and the decision making process. Bromsgrove is committed to ensuring that all of its services meet the needs of the community.

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 This is central to the continued commitment and implementation of the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.

10. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council must ensure that all resources are expended efficiently and effectively. It is essential that the needs of the community are assessed when determining the levels of service deliver appropriate for the community. Bromsgrove is committed through the provision of the Equality and Diversity Forum, Disabled Users Group and wider equality agenda to ensuring that customer need drives service provision and that this is at the heart of our Value for Money agenda.

11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Procurement Issues: As articulated within the report
Personnel Implications: As articulated within the report
Governance/Performance Management : As articulated within the reports

Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime and Disorder Act 1998: None
Policy: As articulated within the report
Environmental: None

12. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	Yes
Chief Executive	Yes
Executive Director - Partnerships and Projects	Yes
Executive Director - Services	Yes
Assistant Chief Executive	Yes
Head of Service	Yes
Head of Financial Services	Yes
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	Yes
Head of Organisational Development & HR	Yes
Corporate Procurement Team	Yes

13. WARDS AFFECTED

All Wards

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Revised Terms of Reference Equalities Champions Group
Appendix 2 Diversity report

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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