

COMMITTEE Overview & Scrutiny	DATE 7 th February 2006	CLASSIFICATION Unrestricted	REPORT NO.	AGENDA ITEM
REPORT OF: Assistant to the Chief Executive		TITLE: Equalities Action Plan – 2005/06 Six Monthly Monitoring Report		
ORIGINATING OFFICER(S): Peter Nathan Head of Corporate Equalities		WARD(S) AFFECTED: All		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This 6-monthly monitoring report informs Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the work undertaken in the year 2005/6 to deliver the Council's Equalities Action Plan between April and September 2005. (see **Appendix A**)

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee

- 2.1 Note and comment on the positive progress that has been made to date with the implementation of the Council's Equalities Action Plan 2005/06.
- 2.2 Identify opportunities for further development or action.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2000 (SECTION 97) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE DRAFTING OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of background papers:

Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection

Equalities Action Plan 2005/06 agreed by Cabinet on 5 May 2005.

Peter Nathan
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3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Equalities Action Plan has enabled the Council to progress and monitor equalities objectives and activities across the Council under the four key themes of the Equality Standard: Consultation, Community Development and Scrutiny; Service Delivery and Customer Care; Employment and Training; and Leadership and Corporate Commitment in a fully integrated way.
- 3.2 The Equalities Action Plan has also been the vehicle for driving forward the Council's ambitious diversity agenda with regard to the Race Equality Scheme, as well as ensuring compliance with the new EC Employment Directives on sexuality and religions belief, which came into force in the UK in December 2003, the final phase of the Disability Discrimination Act which came into force in October 2004, and ensuring that the Council is prepared for the new legislation on age and disability.

4. PROGRESS AND RECENT SUCCESSES

- 4.1 The Council is continuing to make good progress with the implementation of its Equalities Agenda. There is also real evidence that the Council's commitments and priorities for equalities are being successfully translated into real action and change on the ground, and that these changes are attracting third party endorsement. To ensure that these changes are sustained, and improvements built on year on year, a basket of key Equalities Performance Indicators are included with the action plan. These Performance Indicators reflect guidance from the Audit Commission, The Commission for Racial Equality, the Home Office and the Active Communities Unit. Given the nature of the indicators, for example, drawing on the outcomes of the annual residents survey, performance information is only available for the end of year report, although some key elements eg. workforce to reflect the community are tracked in-year as part of the Tower Hamlets Index.
- 4.2 Highlights of key equalities developments and successes arising from the Action Plan for the first half of the financial year are set out below.

National Standards and Awards

The Council:

- was audited in August 2005 on its achievement of reaching Level 5 of the national Equality Standard In 2004/05. This is the highest standard reached to date by any Council.
- has achieved Beacon Status for Race Equality and another Beacon Award for Getting Closer to Communities. This builds on the Council's previous Beacon award for Community Cohesion and a further Beacon Award for the positive action work with Social Care workers in Social Services.
- was successfully re-assessed on its Two Ticks accreditation which relates to arrangements made for the employment of disabled people.

Local Standards

- Selected a new supplier for the provision of a one stop Interpreting and Translation Service in the Council working to a detailed specification.
- Published new guidance on improving disabled access, addressing key aspects of service delivery.
- Targeted up to £1,000,000 this year on improving disabled access to council buildings for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Launched Disabled Go, which provides on-line information on access to 1,000 commercial and public buildings in the borough.
- A Council-wide induction programme has been launched, which ensures that every new member of staff understands the borough's diversity and the Council's priorities in relation to equalities.
- Published employment policies relating to Sexuality and Religion/Belief.

Stronger contribution to equalities from partners

- Reviewed the arrangements for building equalities monitoring into contracts with external organisations to improve clarity and implementation.
- Completed an equality impact assessment of the way the Council grant funds voluntary sector organisations to deliver local services.

Celebrating diversity

- Led and facilitated the delivery of an extensive programme of cultural events to celebrate the borough's rich diversity, encourage cross cultural contact, and promote mutual understanding and respect of people's distinct cultural and religious heritage. This included International Women's week, Black History Month, and European day of Disabled People celebrations.

More rigorous and robust approach to equalities

- Continued the implementation of the programme of Equalities Impact Assessments which includes consideration of gender, race, faith, disability, sexuality and age.

5. EQUALITIES CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 By incorporating national standards, the integrated Equalities Action Plan represents an important step in progressing the Council's equality & diversity agenda. The attached monitoring report on the Plan clearly shows how equalities is at the heart of the Council agenda and the extent of the progress towards

integrating equality and diversity fully into all aspects of service delivery and employment practice.

- 5.2 This report demonstrates the progress being made with creating an environment in which everyone who lives and works in our borough is treated with dignity and respect and where everyone can improve their life chances and access the increasing opportunities on offer.

6. ANTI-POVERTY CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The integrated Equalities Action Plan aims to tackle the barriers currently preventing some of the most disadvantaged people and marginalised communities in our borough from accessing the life opportunities on offer and aims to enable them to actively participate in creating and sharing prosperity in the borough.

7 S.A.G.E. CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 There are no specific issues relating to the environment raised in this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 There have been major changes in equalities legislation over the last year and new sweeping changes are expected, incoming legislation on age and disability, as well as the establishment of a single Equalities Commission to replace the existing equalities bodies. The Council's agenda on equalities is an ambitious one, which has marked it out as a leader on equality and diversity to date. The Council has been one of the first councils in London and nationally to extend the remit of the National Equality Standard for Local Government beyond the three statutory requirements (race, disability and gender) to encompass also sexuality, age and religion or belief. Progress to date has been very positive, but much work remains to be done to ensure that the Council maintains the highest level of the Standard in 2005/6 with regard to all six equality strands.

- 8.2 The Equalities Action Plan provides a focus for all the Council's equalities work, and a means by which Members can ensure that each of the progress milestones are achieved. The arrangements in place to review progress during the year through the Corporate Equalities Steering Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, are considered to be effective ways of keeping this work on track.