

COMMITTEE	DATE	CLASSIFICATION	REPORT NO.	AGENDA ITEM
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	6 March 2007	Unrestricted		8.2
REPORT OF: Assistant Chief Executive ORIGINATING OFFICER(S): Alan Steward Interim Corporate Equalities Manager		TITLE: Equalities Action Plan – 2006/07 Six Monthly Monitoring Report: Update WARD(S) AFFECTED: All		

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a further update on the Equalities Action Plan six monthly monitoring report considered at its January meeting.

2. Recommendations

Members are recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the further information and action on the Equalities Action Plan.

Local Government Act, 2000 (Section 97)

List of "Background Papers" used in the Drafting of this Report

Brief description of background papers:

Equalities Action Plan 2006/07 agreed by Cabinet on 7 June 06

Equalities Action Plan – 2006/07 Six Monthly Monitoring Report – Overview and Scrutiny Committee, January 2007

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

Alan Steward
Interim Corporate Equalities Manager
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3. Background

- 3.1 The Equalities Action Plan (EAP) six monthly monitoring report was submitted to the January 2007 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members noted the significant progress in implementing the Equalities Action Plan but raised concerns about a number of aspects of the form and content that made it difficult to scrutinise progress and identify potential improvements. This report responds to the comments and concerns raised.
- 3.2 Members were concerned that there was not enough information contained within the monitoring report to judge progress on the amber and red indicators. In particular that progress was reported for the end of September and information lacking about the reasons for any slippage, remedial action being taken and any new milestones that were established. This has been addressed and the further information is provided in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 Analysis shows that in all cases although there have been delays in meeting the targets, these should be rectified so that most of the actions will be implemented by the year end.
- 3.4 Inevitably the reasons for slippage vary significantly. They include:
- delays as a result of waiting for confirmation of funding or policy from central government
 - changing circumstances where implementation of the action uncovers further issues that need consideration. For example, consultation with users or staff raising issues that will improve the final action but may take longer.
 - revised timetables for other initiatives affecting the timescales for the equality action. For example, changes to letting a contract or a delivery strategy.
 - the need to increase capacity or resources to make sure that the actions are delivered.
- 3.5 This would indicate that there are lessons to incorporate into developing the Plan in future. These would include:
- making sure that all targets are realistic and deliverable within timescales
 - checking the potential impact of other services or strategies more thoroughly
 - allowing greater time to deliver actions that require consultation.
- 3.6 Members also raised concerns about the level of detail provided in the monitoring report so that they could draw conclusions as to whether progress was satisfactory.
- 3.7 Further analysis of the EAP indicates that the rigour and robustness of the activity, milestones and success criteria needs improvement. We also need to provide greater detail on progress for members to be confident that the actions and progress are reflected in service improvements and having the required impact. While this has traditionally focused on those actions considered at amber or red, it is recognised that future reports should provide an update on all actions.
- 3.8 The issues raised above are important in improving the robustness of the Equalities Action Plan but are difficult to address part way through the year. It is therefore proposed to build these into the preparations for next year's EAP.

- 3.9 It is very timely to review the structure and content of the EAP. There has been significant new equalities legislation over the last two years that we need to incorporate into the Council's Equalities Action Plan for 2007/08. This includes:
- Race and Diversity Scheme agreed at Cabinet in June 2006
 - Disability Equalities Scheme agreed at Cabinet in December 2007
 - The forthcoming Gender Equality Scheme that has to be agreed by end of April 2007
 - The integration of the various Equalities Commissions into the new Commission for Equalities and Human Rights.
- 3.10 With the burgeoning individual schemes, we will take the opportunity to review the way that the EAP is brought together and then both implemented and monitored.
- 3.11 In addition, the Council has invested in a corporate performance monitoring system – Excelsis – that is being used to monitor the Strategic Plan, directorate and service plans. It is proposed to enter the Equalities Action Plan into this system next year. This brings significant advantages including setting out clear milestones for judging progress and performance. It will also link equality actions into service and team plans that will further embed the EAP within the Council.
- 3.12 The Council's Corporate Equalities Steering Group – with representatives from all directorates – will discuss the preparations for next year's EAP at its February meeting. This will include discussion and agreement on improving the robustness of both the EAP and its monitoring, particularly around actions, targets and milestones. The outcome can be reported to a future meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. Concurrent Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal)

- 4.1 The European Union Race Directive 2000/43 (published in June 2000) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnic origin by laying down "the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin".
- 4.2 In November 2000, the European Union published the Equal Treatment Framework Directive 2000/78. This Directive sets out the anti-discrimination "principle of equal treatment" in the context of sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability and age. This Directive was implemented on 2 December 2006 in relation to disability and age.
- 4.3 The Government consultation paper "Towards Equality and Diversity-Implementing the Employment Race Directive" (2001) indicated its intention to implement the Directives by amendment to the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The consultation paper also referred to the Government's intention to introduce legislation to prohibit discrimination in work and training on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion and age. The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations 2003 were enacted with effect from 1 and 2 December 2003 and transpose the phase 1 provisions of the Directive into UK law. The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 are intended to give effect to the provisions on age discrimination with effect from 1 October 2006 though currently they are still in draft form.

- 4.4 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 strengthens the Race Relations Act 1976 by extending protection against racial discrimination by public authorities and by placing a duty on public authorities to have regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote racial equality and good race relations.
- 4.5 The Equalities Action Plan monitoring report detailed in Appendix 1 sets out the Council's intentions and progress with regard to equality which has been formulated having regard to and in compliance with legislation. The Council's policies and plans will need to be kept to under review in order to embrace future legislative changes.

5. Comments of the Chief Financial Officer

- 5.1 As service design and provision give consideration to Equalities issues Directorate budgets reflect these and consequently no additional budgetary provision is expected as a result of the Equalities Action Plan 2006/07. Any additional costs arising from implementing the Equalities Action Plans will be contained within Directorate 2006/07 budgets.

6. Equal Opportunity Implications

- 6.1 By incorporating national standards, the integrated Equalities Action Plan represents an important step in progressing the Council's equality and 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.
- 6.2 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.

7. Anti-Poverty Implications

- 7.1 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.

8. Sustainable Action for a Greener Environment

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

9. Risk Management

- 9.1 There have been major changes in equalities legislation over the last few years and new sweeping changes are expected 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 2006/7.

- 9.2 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.