

Committee Cabinet	Date 30 July 2008	Classification Unrestricted	Report No	Agenda Item No
Report of: Acting Assistant Chief Executive		Title: Diversity and Equality Action Plan – 2008/2009		
Originating Officer(s) Frances Jones Diversity and Equality Coordinator, Scrutiny and Equalities		Wards Affected All		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents Cabinet with the Council's draft Diversity and Equality Action Plan (DEAP) 2008/09. The Plan pulls together an ambitious programme of equalities work across the Council. It reflects the activities required for the implementation of the Council's Race Equality, Disability Equality and Gender Equality Schemes, the actions that are necessary to achieve and maintain the highest level of the Equality Standard for local government and the continued implementation of the Council's commitment to Community Cohesion.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the Diversity and Equality Action Plan 2008/09 which is set out in Appendix 1.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 1972 SECTION 100D (AS AMENDED) LIST OF "BACKGROUND PAPERS" USED IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

Brief description of background papers:	Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection
Equality Action Plan 2007/08 agreed by Cabinet on 5 September 2007.	France Jones, Diversity & Equality Co-ordinator, Scrutiny and Equalities 020 7364 4521
Six-monthly and end of year monitoring reports, Overview and Scrutiny, on 8 January 2008 and 10 June 2008	

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Tower Hamlets is one of the most culturally diverse and vibrant boroughs in the country. The rich cultural heritage of people living and working in the borough has been something that the Council has valued and celebrated. While diversity brings tremendous strengths to Tower Hamlets, it also brings real challenges. There continue to be groups in the local community who are not yet able to access all the opportunities and life chances that are available. Some people continue to face discrimination at work and in the community. The Council is committed to tackling this and promoting an environment where people are treated with dignity and respect, where people's differences are understood and valued, and where different communities are able to live at ease with each other.
- 3.2 The Council has placed Diversity and Equality at the core of the Strategic Plan and set itself the target of maintaining the very highest level of the national Equality Standard. The Council has also sought to be at the very forefront of developments on Equalities and Community Cohesion, benchmarking its progress against best practice from across the country. This commitment and the achievement of real progress on the ground have been recognised by central government.
- 3.3 The Council has developed an effective approach to equality action planning and monitoring. In March 2002 the then Policy and Implementation Committee agreed to bring together the separate Stephen Lawrence Action Plan and the Equality Action Plan into a single integrated document. The aim was to create a strong focus for driving equalities through the organisation, and achieving real change on the ground.
- 3.4 The national Equality Standard, which was introduced in 2002, has been a powerful tool for taking forward a broad and integrated approach to addressing equalities issues. The Equality Standard was developed jointly by the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Employers Organisation, with assistance from the Audit Commission. Cabinet formally adopted the Equality Standard on the 12 June 2002 and, from that time, it has been a key reference in planning and reviewing the Council's equalities agenda. The core objectives used in the attached integrated Plan reflect the key headings of the Standard: service delivery and customer care, consultation and community development and scrutiny, leadership and corporate commitment and employment and training.
- 3.5 Using the Standard, the Council is able to track progress and success year on year. An important strength is the opportunity to have progress independently validated which took place in May 2007. This confirmed that Tower Hamlets is at Level 5 of the Standard and in 2006 the Council was the first local authority in the country to receive the Equality Mark from the Improvement and Development Agency in recognition of this.
- 3.6 In March 2007 the Equality Standard was revised and the key changes include:
- The achievement of demonstrable outcomes in regard to age, religion or belief and sexual orientation by March 2009
 - Every department and service is engaged in equality self-assessment and external validation from levels 3-5 of the Standard
 - A greater emphasis on the community leadership role of local government in influencing partners to improve their equalities practice and deliver outcomes for local residents

In March 2009 we will be re-assessed against the revised Equality Standard for Local Government. The Diversity and Equality Action Plan will therefore contain a comprehensive programme of actions to ensure that our equalities practice meets the requirements of the revised Standard and that we retain our Level 5 status

3.7 Cabinet first agreed the Council's Race Equality Scheme on the 12 June 2002 and subsequently a new 3-year scheme (for 2005/08). On 8 November 2006 Cabinet agreed the Disability Equality Scheme and on 4 April 2007 the Gender Equality Scheme was also agreed. The actions set out in each of these statutory documents reflect the priorities and requirements of the respective Schemes. In line with national guidance, the race, disability and gender equality objectives have been clearly highlighted within the Plan.

3.8 The refreshed Community Plan to 2020 includes an overarching theme to build 'One Tower Hamlets'. This theme covers three core elements: Tackling inequality; building strong and cohesive communities and; supporting effective community leadership. The Diversity and Equality Action Plan sets out a number of the activities which will enable us to deliver on this theme.

3.9 In February 2008 the Government published their response to the 2007 report of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. The report included a new definition of a cohesive community:

"Our vision of an integrated and cohesive community is based on three foundations:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly

and three key ways of living together:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds"

The actions within the Diversity and Equality Action Plan and our commitment to delivering 'One Tower Hamlets' demonstrates that we are addressing the issues posed by this new definition.

3.10 All of the above developments therefore place an additional spotlight on the Council's diversity and equality work. Matched with this, in its performance monitoring role the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has questioned the effectiveness of the model of previous Action Plans as a performance management tool. Over the coming year the Council will continue to work to provide excellent public services that understand our diversity to achieve better equality. The Diversity and Equality Action Plan will also be monitored to ensure it is an effective tool for measuring and analysing the outcomes of that work.

4. DISSEMINATION OF THE PLAN

4.1 The preparation of the Diversity and Equality Action Plan has taken place through the Council's Corporate Equalities Steering Group which has representation from across the authority and includes the Trade Unions, and with the contribution of Directorate Equalities Focus Groups.

- 4.2 Once agreed by Cabinet, the Plan will be distributed widely and will also be published on the Council's Web site. Internally, the Plan will be taken forward through each of the Directorate Equalities Focus Groups, and will be reflected in team plans and individual staff performance and development plans. Copies of the Plan will also be made available through the Council's intranet.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The contents of the Diversity and Equality Action Plan have been drawn together by the Council's Corporate Equalities Steering Group with contributions from all Directorates and reflecting the input from latest consultation, such as the Annual Residents Survey and external consultation groups, including: the Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum; the Tower Hamlets Access Group and; the LGBT Forum, as well as partnership groups such as the Race and Hate Crime Interagency Forum and the Refugee and New Migrants Forum. The contents of the Plan are also informed from feedback through the staff survey, the local Trade Unions and corporate staff groups which have a specific focus on Disability, Sexuality and Ethnicity. Further input from these groups will be sought as part of the implementation process to ensure maximum impact is achieved from this work.

6. MONITORING AND EVALUATION ARRANGEMENTS

- 6.1 As well as the monitoring of implementation taking place through the Directorate Equality Focus Groups, and the Corporate Equalities Steering Group, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee formally reviews progress every six months. The Council also seeks out opportunities for external challenge and benchmarking.
- 6.2 The involvement of members has been crucial to the successful implementation of the 2007/08 Plan. In February a Members' workshop was held to explore how the role of Members could be strengthened. In 2008/09 a Members' Equalities Group will be established to take forward this work.

7. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL)

- 7.1 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".
- 7.2 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 is to be implemented on 2 December 2006 in relation to disability and age.

- 7.3 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 gave effect to the provisions on age discrimination with effect from 1 October 2006.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 The Diversity and Equality Action Plan detailed in Appendix 1 sets out the Council's intentions with regard to equality and has been formulated having regard to and in compliance with legislation. Regular monitoring and review of the Plan enables the Council to maintain compliance with statutory requirements as well as measuring progress in relation to non-statutory aspects.

8. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 8.1 As service design and provision already give consideration to equalities issues Directorate budgets reflect these issues and consequently no additional budgetary provision is expected as a result of the Diversity and Equality Action Plan 2008/09. Any additional costs arising from implementing the Plan will be contained within Directorate 2008/09 revenue budgets.

9. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 By incorporating national standards, the Diversity and Equality Action Plan represents an important step in progressing the Council's diversity and equality agenda. The attached Plan clearly shows how equalities are at the heart of the Council agenda and the progress towards integrating diversity and equality fully into all aspects of service delivery and employment practice. The aim of the Plan is to create 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.

10. ANTI-POVERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Diversity and Equality Action Plan aims to tackle the barriers currently preventing some of the most disadvantaged people in our community from accessing the life opportunities on offer and aims to enable them to participate actively in creating and sharing prosperity in the borough.

11. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 11.1 Efforts will be made to ensure that in delivering the commitments of the Diversity and Equality Action Plan the impact on the environment is kept to an absolute minimum. This

includes the use of recycled paper in any documentation, and careful consideration of the methods used to engage with local communities, partners and staff.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 The Council is seeking to implement an ambitious diversity and equality agenda in the context of changes in national legislation and standards. Progress to date has been very positive, but there is still much to be done if all the Council's targets are to be achieved and all the new legislative requirements are fully complied with. Any slippage could potentially undermine this.
- 12.2 The Diversity and Equality 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, Corporate Management Team and finally by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are considered to be effective ways of keeping this work on track.
- 12.3 Diversity and equality performance indicators will help keep the focus firmly on delivery and outcomes. The emphasis on consultation will mean that the Council's performance in this area will be judged by the experiences of service users on the ground.
- 12.4 A greater emphasis will be given this year to communicating the progress that is being made to the wider community and to staff, including greater use of existing communications media such as East End Life and Pulling Together.
- 12.5 The Council will continue to work closely with the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to ensure that local practice in implementing the Equality Standard and all equalities issues is informed by best practice taking place in other parts of the country.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Diversity and Equality Action Plan 2008/09