

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting22nd November 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

Diversity: Performance and Progress

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that outlined the progress made by the Council in achieving its diversity objectives, highlighting in particular, performance against the first six months of the Single Equality Scheme.

It was explained that the Council had a series of legal duties to promote equality of opportunity in both its service delivery and employment practices, including a statutory responsibility to promote race, gender and disability equality.

In order to achieve these duties the Council adopted a 2nd Edition of its Single Equality Scheme in March 2007, which not only outlined the Authority's commitment to the diversity agenda but also ensured its statutory duties were being met. The Scheme was accompanied by detailed action plans for race, disability and gender equality which contained a series of actions for the authority broken down by Council Plan theme.

It was explained that the actions from the action plans were then included within Service improvement Plans for individual service areas and therefore monitored through the Council's usual performance management arrangements. This had ensured that the promotion of equality of opportunity was embedded across the Council and the responsibility for implementation lay with individual Heads of Service.

Members were advised that the approach adopted had proven to be successful and six monthly monitoring results showed that of the 78 targets in the Disability Equality Action Plan, 25 had already been met, 46 remained on target and only seven had slipped. Of the 60 targets in the Race Equality Action Plan, 14 had been met, 44 remained on target and two had slipped with the 58 targets in the Gender Equality Action Plan showing 16 met, 40 on target and only two which had slipped. It was noted that of those which had failed to meet target, remedial actions had

been identified and would be implemented and monitored accordingly.

Members were informed that in addition to progress against the Single Equality Scheme the Council had also strengthened and further improved many of its processes related to ensuring equality of opportunity. Key amongst these was the development and roll out of a new Equality Impact Assessment Process. This process assessed all proposed policies and changes in service delivery for any possible negative impact against various groups in advance of their proposal to Cabinet. Any identified negative impacts could then either be addressed or amendments made to the proposals accordingly. The approach, which was now embedded in the Council's revised Constitution, ensured Members of Cabinet could be assured that all significant new policies requesting Cabinet approval would be of equal benefit to all residents of the Borough.

The diversity content on the Council's website had been significantly strengthened within the last six months to both meet the Council's statutory duties around publishing information but also to provide both Members and Officers, as well as the community, key information in relation to diversity and the Council's approach. In addition, a series of comprehensive diversity profiles were available on the website which contained information about the communities living in the borough. It was noted that the information had proven crucial in service planning and delivery, carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and could benefit community groups, for example in informing funding applications.

The involvement of the community remains crucial to the Council's success in promoting equality and diversity. The Disability Advisory Group continues to meet, advising and challenging Officers on a variety of issues including community safety, car parking and electoral registration. The group also considers the Council's progress against its Disability Equality Action Plan, thereby providing a key element of external challenge. Also, a series of guides to effective consultation have been produced, including consulting Black and Minority Ethnic and disabled residents, ensuring that officers across the Council carrying out consultation events are sensitive to the needs of all residents of the borough.

Members were informed that in September the Council and its partners from across Renaissance held a "Tell Us What You Think" event at ARC, the aim of which was to collect information to inform the statutory revision of the Race Equality Action Plan. It was advised that the event was a great success with over 170 local people attending and giving their views on a variety of Council services. It was noted that a revised Race Equality Action Plan would be brought to Cabinet for approval, along with

the 3rd edition of the Single Equality Scheme, in March 2008.

Cabinet were informed that the Council continued its improvement against the Equality Standard for Local Government and had a target of achieving level 3 by 2009. The Council were making good progress towards early achievement of the target with over 50% of both level 2 and level 3 criteria already being met. The outstanding areas were Human Resources, training and procurement. However the Council was already addressing these issues with the new People Strategy, training programme and the Council's increasing influence on procurement regionally ensuring good progress towards the equalities objectives.

It was explained that effective training was an important aspect of successfully promoting equality and diversity. The Council had undertaken a large amount of training so far including training over 400 front line staff in using the Council's telephone translation system and delivering specially tailored and bespoke sessions for services on request. It was noted that a new corporate diversity training programme would be rolled out across the Authority in the new year, which would see all first, second and third tier officers, as well as 10% of all other employees, receiving training by the Spring of 2008.

Members were advised that the Council was increasingly influencing the promotion of equality of opportunity across the North East region. It was noted that a key example of this being the significant levels of involvement of the Council in the work of the North East Centre for Excellence to improve equality and procurement. Good progress had been made so far and the Council was represented on a small working group tasked with making further improvements to the process which would then be rolled out across the region.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

3. Reasons for the Decision

To ensure the Council continues to make progress towards achieving its diversity objectives and duties.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By no later than midnight on Friday 30th November 2007

Proper Officer
26 November 2007