

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

22 NOVEMBER 2007

**REPORT OF THE
CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Portfolio: Corporate and Social Inclusion - Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Laing

DIVERSITY: PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS

1. Summary (expanded report summary)

This report outlines 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.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) receive the report and note its contents

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

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

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same

purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;

- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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DIVERSITY: PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS

SUMMARY

This report outlines 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (i) receive the report and note its contents

DETAIL

1. The Council has 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 has ensured that the promotion of equality of opportunity is embedded across the Council and the responsibility for implementation lies with individual Heads of Service.
4. The approach adopted has proven to be successful and six monthly monitoring results show that of the 78 targets in the Disability Equality Action Plan, 25 have already been met, 46 remain on target and only seven slipped. Of the 60 targets in the Race Equality Action Plan, 14 have been met, 44 remain on target and two have slipped with the 58 targets in the Gender Equality Action Plan showing 16 met, 40 on target and only two which have slipped. Of those which have failed to meet target, remedial actions have been identified and will be implemented and monitored accordingly.

5. In addition to progress against the Single Equality Scheme the Council has also strengthened and further improved many of its processes related to ensuring equality of opportunity. Key amongst these is the development and roll out of a new Equality Impact Assessment Process. This process assesses 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 can then either be addressed or amendments made to the proposals accordingly. This approach, which is now embedded in the Council's revised Constitution, ensures Members of Cabinet can be assured that all significant new policies requesting Cabinet approval will be of equal benefit to all residents of the Borough.
6. The diversity content on the Council's website has been significantly strengthened within the last six months to both meet our 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 are now available on the website which contain information about the communities living in the borough. This information has proven crucial in service planning and delivery, carrying out Equality Impact Assessments and could benefit community groups, for example in informing funding applications.
7. 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.
8. In September the Council and its partners from across Renaissance held a "Tell Us What You Think" event at ARC, the aim of which being to collect information to inform the statutory revision of the Race Equality Action Plan. The event was a great success with over 170 local people attending and giving their views on a variety of Council services. A revised Race Equality Action Plan will be brought to Cabinet for approval, along with the 3rd edition of the Single Equality Scheme, in March 2008.
9. The Council continues its improvement against the Equality Standard for Local Government and has a target of achieving level 3 by 2009. We are 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 are Human Resources, training and procurement. However the Council is already addressing these issues with the new People Strategy, training programme and our increasing influence on procurement regionally ensuring good progress towards our equalities objectives.
10. Effective training is an important aspect of successfully promoting equality and diversity. The Council has undertaken a large amount of training so far including training over 400 front line staff in using our telephone translation system and delivering specially tailored and bespoke sessions for services on request. A new corporate diversity training programme will be rolled out across the Authority in the new year, which will see all first, second and third tier officers, as well as 10% of all other employees, receiving training by the Spring of 2008.
11. Finally the Council is increasingly influencing the promotion of equality of opportunity across the North East region. 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 has been made so far and the Council is

represented on a small working group tasked with making further improvements to the process which will then be rolled out across the region.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. There are no financial implications arising as a direct result of this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

13. The successful implementation of the Single Equality Scheme and its associated action plans ensures the Council is meeting all its statutory duties in relation to diversity.

RISK ASSESSMENT

14. The Council's approach to diversity is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

15. The Council's approach to diversity has a positive impact across all themes of the Community Strategy.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

16. This report has not been subject to external consultation. Details of how the Council uses resident consultation and involvement to promote the diversity agenda are included in paragraphs 7-8.

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Background Papers

Single Equality Scheme 2nd Edition

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

This report affects all Wards in the Borough.

Property

There are no direct links between this report and the Council's Capital Programme and Asset Management Plan.