

EXETER CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES
17 JUNE 2009

EXECUTIVE
29 JUNE 2009

REVIEW OF EQUALITIES

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the committee on achievements made so far and advise of future action over the coming year.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 2007 the Council published a three-year Comprehensive Equality Scheme in line with legislative requirements, setting out measurable outcomes for our service users, staff and councillors.
- 2.2 Since then although annual updates on key achievements have been published as an appendix to the Corporate Plan, there has been no formal update on progress against the five outcomes of the Scheme to this committee.
- 2.3 By April 2010 a revised Scheme will have to be published so now seems to be an appropriate time to reflect on outputs and outcomes achieved so far and highlight future work that may be undertaken.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The following is a list of our key achievements against each of the five outcomes of the Comprehensive Equality Scheme. This builds on the list which appeared as an Appendix to the Corporate Plan.
- (i) **Service users from traditionally hard to hear groups have access to information about, and are able to put forward their views on Council services, policies and procedures (consultation, communication, service development, access to councillors).**

Consultation was carried out on our behalf by Living Options Devon with disabled members of staff to share their experiences and make recommendations for improvements to the working environment. An action plan has been produced and while some items are best fed into the development of the overall Workforce Strategy, immediate tasks that have been undertaken include a refresh of the Human Resource User Groups and ensuring that equality and access issues are a standing agenda item. The Groups have representatives from all services and feed into the Employee Liaison Forum which is attended by Councillors, Senior Management, Head of HR and Unison/Staff representatives.

A community Engagement Database has been developed providing community contacts in place and making it easier for officers to contact the right organisation.

This also helps the Council to have an overview of the different groups that are working with or representing communities in the City.

- (ii) **All service users feel confident that the Council is committed to equality and diversity and is making real progress towards delivering actions (scrutiny, audit, committees, evaluation, reporting).**

Equality Impact Assessments were carried out on Bereavement Services, Parking Enforcement Services, the Homelessness strategy, the Positive Steps Fund and the Benefits NVQ Assessment Centre. Issues identified will feed into the development of these areas of work ensuring that, wherever possible, the needs of different groups of people are met and potential for discrimination removed. For example Bereavement Services are developing a way of maintain stock graves so that Muslim burials can be catered for at short notice.

Building Control has continued its programme of auditing the accessibility of Council buildings to ensure the needs of disabled people are being met. The target of 20 accessible buildings by March 2009 has been achieved. An Exeter Access Guide has been published which shows the facilities available at different venues throughout the City Centre. The guide will be published on the website but hard copies will also be distributed through Living Options Devon and Exeter Visitor Information.

Improvements have been made to the Isca Bowls Centre to make it more accessible for people with mobility problems including designated disabled parking bays and automatic external and internal doors.

The Markets & Halls Team in Estates Services has worked with staff to undertake an initial equalities review of facilities and services at the Matford Centre and Corn Exchange. This will ensure that they are responsive to the needs of all service users. Further actions which have been included in the work programme for 2009/10 include a survey of customers.

Diversity awareness training has been delivered to all 451 Exeter taxi drivers and is a pre-requisite for any applicant for a taxi licence. Retraining will be carried out every five years and the effectiveness of the training is monitored by mystery shoppers from Living Options Devon.

- (iii) **The Council knows who its customers are and is able to respond to their needs (monitoring, assessment, delivery).**

Work continues to embed equalities at each level of performance management. The Exeter Vision has been reviewed in consultation with the Vision Reference Groups and wider interest groups and equalities outcomes are now embedded in the Service Improvement Portfolios. The Vision will ensure a whole-city view of equalities so that the LSP can work more effectively with partner agencies to tackle the issues.

All new housing tenant details are collected at sign up so that now 65% of all tenant data has been collected and work can begin to ensure needs are met. For example a follow up survey is being undertaken of all those who indicated that they have a disability.

All the parks now have clearer signage and improvements have been made to paths to make them more accessible. In particular work has been carried out in Bury Meadow to reduce risks from anti-social behaviour that might deter young women, their children

and older people from enjoying the park. This work involved removal of shrubs, pruning of shrubs and redesigning of beds to provide clear lines of sight by opening up the vistas. All work was carried out following detailed consultation with local residents and the police. The residents have positively welcomed the changes.

- (iv) **Relations between different communities are good, tensions are challenged and the diversity of the City is promoted and celebrated (cohesion, leadership, challenge).**

The Chief Executive has been working closely with the Police and local communities following the Princesshay incident to ensure that any necessary support is provided. This is feeding into a wider review of how the Council engages with the community.

The Lord Mayor continues to attend and organise a diverse range of civic events including National Holocaust Memorial Day, a Violence Against Women Campaign in Bedford Square, opening of a Polish Saturday School at Montgomery Primary School and a thank you reception for carers held at the Guildhall. The Lord Mayor also supports and promotes a charity every year. In 2008/09 this was Southbrook College which specialises in education for young people with learning difficulties. For 2009/10 the charity chosen is Dream-A-Way which provides holidays and outings for disabled people.

RAMM's Small World display was shown at four schools and colleges in the City. The display of textiles and adornments from around the world was accompanied by talks and workshops encouraged to stimulate debate about issues of identity to encourage the celebration of diversity.

- (v) **All service users feel confident that the Council is committed to equality and diversity and is making real progress towards delivering actions (scrutiny, audit, committees, evaluation, reporting).**

In partnership with the Trade Unions, Human Resources commissioned an independent Equal Pay Audit. No significant issues were found but an action plan is being developed to pick up any minor points. This will be reviewed annually.

As indicated at 3.1 (i) Human Resources worked with Living Options Devon on a consultation with disabled staff to look at potential barriers to recruitment and retention. This also resulted in a review and update of relevant sections of the Employment Handbook.

4 FUTURE WORK

Equality Framework for Local Government

- 4.1 In 2005 following a self-assessment carried out by Internal Audit, the Council declared at Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. The intention was then to work towards another assessment at Level 3. However in the meantime the IDeA has replaced the Standard with a new Equality Framework. The equivalent of Level 3 status for the new framework is 'Achieving'¹.

¹ There are three levels for the Equality Framework for Local Government: Developing, Achieving and Excellent.

- 4.2 The Equality Framework and its predecessor is no longer measured by a performance indicator; however, it can be used to provide evidence for the Comprehensive Area Assessment and may be a useful tool in itself to help the Council analyse its work to meet equality outcomes.
- 4.3 A Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership consultant has been invited to attend the Corporate Equalities Officer Group in July to update on the procedure for moving forward for assessment against the new Equality Framework. RIEP has a key objective and associated funding to support all local authorities in the South West to meet the Achieving level of the Framework.

Comprehensive Area Assessment

- 4.4 Equality and diversity is an underpinning theme throughout the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- 4.5 The initial draft report from the Use of Resources Assessment is due in the summer and feedback from the Area Assessment is due in the autumn. Both of these will provide indicators of where we need to improve.

Comprehensive Equality Scheme

- 4.6 The current scheme only runs until April 2010 so planning for the development of the new scheme has started.
- 4.7 The Scheme will need to take into account developments in legislation and the inspection regime and as with any major strategy it will need to be developed with the involvement of a diverse range of communities to ensure that it reflects their needs.
- 4.8 During the development of the current scheme a partnership was set up with the County Council, other District Councils and the Police to consult disabled services users. It is unlikely that any such partnership will be convened this time however the Council will try to link into any other consultation and engagement work being carried out wherever possible to ensure good value for money and the widest possible spectrum of views.

5 LEGISLATION

- 5.1 The Equality Bill was published in April 2009 and if successful the majority of clauses are expected to come into force autumn 2010. Some of the key proposals from the Equality Bill are noted below:
- Introduction of new generic equality duty on public bodies bringing together existing public duties on race, disability and gender and extended to age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.
 - Introduction of a new public sector duty to consider reducing socio-economic inequalities.
 - Powers to outlaw unjustifiable age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services.
 - Protection from discrimination for people associated with someone who is protected themselves, for example as the carer of a disabled person.
 - Public bodies to increase transparency by reporting on aspects of employment policy such as gender pay gaps, ethnic minority employment and disability employment.

- Banning secrecy clauses which prevent people discussing their pay
- Requiring public bodies to tackle discrimination and promote equality through their purchasing functions.
- Extending positive action so that employers can take into account, when selecting between two equally qualified candidates, under-representation of disadvantaged groups.
- Encourage more women into public life by extending use of women-only short list to 2030.
- Allow tribunals to make wider recommendations in discrimination cases going beyond benefiting the individual so that there are benefits for the rest of the workforce.
- Explore further how to allow discrimination claims on multiple grounds.

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Costs related to the consultation on new Comprehensive Equality Scheme will be met within existing budgets.

7 RECOMMENDED

- (1) That Scrutiny Committee – Resources supports the future actions put forward in this report and recommends its approval to the Executive.

DIRECTOR CORPORATE SERVICES

CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1972 (as amended)
Background papers used in compiling this report:-