

Report to: Cabinet, 12 February 2013

Report of: Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Communications

Subject: EQUALITY PRIORITIES

1. Decision Required

- 1.1 To consider and approve the Equality Priorities
- 1.2 To approve the revised Equality & Inclusion Strategy, Consultation Strategy and Equal Opportunities Policy.
- 1.3 To note the proposals for training on equalities.

2. Background

Equality Priorities

- 2.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, public bodies have a general duty to show 'due regard' to the need to;
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people
 - Foster good relations between people

Having due regard means, consciously thinking about these three aims as part of the process of decision making and delivering services.

- 2.2 Further to the general duty set out in the Act, public bodies are required to set equality objectives linked to furthering the aims of the general duty and refresh these objectives at a minimum of every four years.
- 2.3 To meet these requirements, the Policy & Performance team have developed six equality priorities. These priorities have been developed through consultation with partners, service managers and senior officers, and reflect the council's strong commitment to Customer Care, in particular 'Putting the Customer First'. The intention is that these priorities will enable us to meet this vision and emphasize how important listening and engaging with communities is to developing and delivering local services. They also reflect the fact that the Council has a corporate responsibility as a major employer in the City. As priorities they set out the council's key objectives in regards to equality and inclusion.
- 2.4 The proposed equality priorities are:
 - Respect and value staff, customers, councillors and partners so that they are treated with dignity and respect;
 - Engage effectively with our communities so that people can influence decisions that affect their lives;
 - Empower people in their communities to shape and tackle local issues
 - Ensure services are centred on meeting the needs of our customers;
 - Promote fair pay and equal access to employment and learning and development opportunities within the City Council; and

- Build a clear picture of local need based on what local people have told us and what we know about our customers.

2.5 It is envisaged that these priorities will help to guide decisions taken and ensure that any changes made to service provision continues to address the individual needs of the customer. They provide a set of guiding principles that will be particularly important when considering the next steps taken in relation to localism and also commissioning. They also ensure that we meet the legal requirements set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Equality & Inclusion Action Plan

2.6 To support the council to achieve the priorities set out above, an action plan has been developed. This action plan will be monitored by Julie Slatter, PIE Service Manager and Councillor Lucy Hodgson, Cabinet member for Customer Service and Communications.

2.7 The actions cited in the action plan reflect the work that has already been committed to in the 2012/13 service improvement plans and in the Corporate Plan, with a small number of other actions identified to address a gap in provision.

2.8 Under the specific duties set out in the Equality Act 2010 – public bodies are required to publish information related to the progress made against the objectives. Policy & Performance will produce an annual progress update which will be made available on the council website.

Consultation

2.9 Following development of the equality priorities and action plan, both documents were subject to a 12 week consultation exercise. Public sector bodies, council partners and existing networks such as the Community Engagement Network, Worcestershire equalities group and West Midlands Equalities Group were asked to review the equality priorities, action plan and supporting documents i.e. equality strategy, equal opportunities policy and consultation strategy.

2.10 Consultees were asked;

- what they thought of the proposed equality priorities
- had any elements been missed from the priorities
- what action would they expect us to take over the next 3 years if we are to meet the priorities
- whether the actions stated in the action plan were enough to deliver the priorities
- was there anything that the council could do in addition or differently

2.11 Members of the public were also invited to offer comment on the proposed priorities. The feedback is summarised in **Appendix 1**. In general the feedback received was largely positive, with all respondents welcoming the development of the priorities and commitment shown through the action plan to achieve these priorities.

2.12 Minor amendments have been made to the Equality Strategy and Action Plan as a result of the consultation and Cabinet are asked to approve the final versions of the Strategy, Equal Opportunities Policy and Consultation Strategy, attached as appendices.

Monitoring arrangements

- 2.13 It is proposed that the objectives are reviewed every 4 years and the action plan is monitored every six months through a CMT/service manager meeting. An annual progress report will be submitted to Cabinet for information.
- 2.14 The final documents will be uploaded onto the council website for public reference.

Equality & Inclusion Training

- 2.15 Given that there are a number of amendments to equalities legislation and the council has developed a number of new equality documents, there is a need to ensure that officers and members are aware of the changes and understand what it means, how it affects them and what the implications are on service delivery.
- 2.16 Equality is in the main about understanding the background and needs of our community to deliver services that meet the needs of individual customers and deliver the results people want. In many cases we are already doing this - going above and beyond the standard service offer to meet the individual needs of our communities – there is a need therefore to reinforce some of this good practice and raise services confidence around equalities.
- 2.17 To do this, it is proposed that;
- There is an article in In The Know (staff publication) that deals with why we have adopted a new equality strategy and equal opportunities policy, what it covers and its impact on our work practices
 - We will prepare a 30 minute awareness raising session to be part of the induction programme for new starters to the organisation. The aim of the session would be for participants to understand our equalities duties and approach in a local and practical way. As well as how this impacts on and enhances their day to day work.
 - Offer a briefing and if required training for members on equalities setting out the context, what equality and inclusion means, our responsibilities and what the local picture tells us.
 - Hold a half day module on equalities for services which will include awareness of the Equality Act followed by a facilitated session on completing an Equality Impact Assessment and what should be included under equalities implications in a report. The aim will be for individuals to understand their particular managerial and leadership role in relation to equality and inclusion and to develop their skills and confidence to undertake equality impact assessments and reports. All documents and supporting guidance will be uploaded onto the shareportal for officer and member use.

3. Policy, Legal, Financial, Equalities and Risk Management Implications

- 3.1 **Policy:** the documents included in this report if approved will ensure that the council can evidence that 'due regard' has been shown to the aims of the Equality Act 2010 and will consider these aims in all decision-making.

- 3.2 **Legal:** We have a legal duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the specific duties set within it including the need to set and publish equality objectives and review these objectives at least every four years. Failure to adhere to these regulations will leave the council open to legal challenge.
- 3.3 **Financial:** the proposed training will be conducted by HR and Policy & Performance officers in-house, so there are no financial implications.
- 3.4 **Equalities:** Worcester city has a set of distinct neighbourhoods with specific needs, the documents included in this report and the training proposed will support the council to deliver the services that these communities need.
- 3.5 **Risk Management:** if council is at risk of legal challenge if it cannot demonstrate that robust equality policies, strategies and plans are in place to support the equality priorities and comply with the duties set out in the Equality Act 2010. The documents included for cabinet approval address these requirements and will mitigate the risk of services not meeting the needs of its customers.

4. Comments of the Performance, Improvement and Efficiency Manager

- 4.1 The documents clearly set out the council's approach to equalities, the next step will be ensuring that this is embedded and understood throughout the Council. The training that is suggested will go some way to doing this and ultimately help support us to meet the needs of our customers.

5. THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS, COUNCILLOR LUCY HODGSON, RECOMMENDS:

- 1. Cabinet approve the equality priorities.**
- 2. Cabinet approve the final versions of the equality strategy, equal opportunities policy and consultation strategy (Appendices 2-4).**
- 3. Cabinet note and approve the proposed training that will be developed.**

Ward(s): All
Contact Officer: Hannah Cooke, Policy & Performance Officer Tel: 2057
Background Papers: None