

Report of	Meeting	Date
Chief Executive (Introduced by the Executive Member for Policy and Performance)	Executive Cabinet	31 March 2011

EQUALITY SCHEME REFRESH 2011

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To present a revised version of the Equality Scheme for the Executive's consideration and approval.

RECOMMENDATION

- That the Executive approve the updated Equality Scheme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

- This report presents an updated Equality Scheme for the Council in terms of our duties as a service provider, employer and community leader. The scheme has been updated to take account of the Equality Act 2010, as this new legislation changes both our general duties and specific duties with regards to equality.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- By adopting the new Equality Scheme, we will ensure that we are meeting the duties required by law with regards to Equality. However, a strong commitment to equality and diversity does not only meet legal obligations, but it also makes good business sense. As an organisation that is committed understanding and shaping services around customers needs, we need to be able to recognise and adapt to the diverse nature of our customers.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- Not to update the Equality Scheme.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Strong Family Support	√	Education and Jobs	√
Being Healthy	√	Pride in Quality Homes and Clean Neighbourhoods	√
Safe Respectful Communities	√	Quality Community Services and Spaces	√
Vibrant Local Economy	√	Thriving Town Centre, Local Attractions and Villages	√
A Council that is a consistently Top Performing Organisation and Delivers Excellent Value for Money			√

BACKGROUND

7. Chorley Council published its first Equality Scheme in December 2006, which has since been refreshed on an annual basis, to take account of our changing community and the changing legislation.
8. Since the last refresh, in February 2008, the legislation regarding equality has been superseded by the Equality Act 2010. The requirement to have an Equality Scheme has been removed under the new legislation, which seeks to be less prescriptive regarding how public authorities meet the required duties.
9. However, it is recommended that we build on our good practice with regards to equality and diversity, and update the current scheme to help us to meet the changes in the new Act. As a reflection of this, the Scheme has been reduced in size and focuses on our commitment to equality, demonstrating how it is embedded within our processes and the additional work we will undertake to meet the requirements of the new legislation.

THE CONTENT OF THE EQUALITY SCHEME

10. The Equality Scheme identifies our nine Equality Strands. Each strand identifies a group of customers who share a similar characteristic, which is protected by law. The exception to this is the rurality strand, which is not protected by law but is contained within our scheme to ensure that the needs of customers who live in rural areas are considered. Rurality was adopted as an Equality Strand by the Council following an overview and scrutiny inquiry in 2007 which made that recommendation.
11. In terms of our service delivery role, the Equality Scheme describes how we ensure that equality is embedded into our processes, and indicates the information and tools that are used to do this. It introduces a new Integrated Impact Assessment tool which will be used by services to consider the impact of a policy / service / function on the equality strands, health, sustainability and reputational impact.
12. In terms of our role as an employer, the Scheme identifies our commitment to equality and diversity with regard to human resources policies, from recruitment and selection to training and development.

MEETING OUR DUTIES IN THE EQUALITY ACT 2010

13. The Equality Act imposes duties on all public bodies, including the Council. The Equality Scheme sets out how we will seek to meet those duties, in terms of the general equality duty and the specific public sector duty. There are some functions which must be met by April 2012, and the Equality Scheme sets out an action plan to achieve this.
14. Since the development of the Scheme and action plan, there have been recent policy changes in relation to the requirements of the specific public sector duty. On 17th March 2011, the Government Equalities Office published a policy review paper which proposed changes to the draft regulations, and reduces the requirements on public bodies to publish certain details and changes the timescales for publication. This policy review paper is currently out for consultation, and comments are sought by 21st April. Following this, regulations will be published and will come into force in July 2011. This will not change the aims and objectives of the Equality Scheme as presented for approval, but may mean that some changes have to be made to the action plan.
15. As part of this action plan, it is proposed that additional training is undertaken with Members and staff on the requirements of the new act and our responsibilities as a service provider, employer and community leader.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

16. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	√
Legal	√	No significant implications in this area	

COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF GOVERNANCE

17. Whilst there is no legal requirement to have an equalities policy it is acknowledged it is good practice to do so to ensure consistency of approach and certainty.

COMMENTS OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

18. The Equality Scheme is a key document in clearly demonstrating the Council's commitment to equality and diversity and providing good customer service. It also supports the Council in meeting its duties, as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Donna Hall
Chief Executive

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
Sarah James	5348	10/03/2011	Revision of the Equality Scheme