

Report of	Meeting	Date
Assistance Chief Executive (Policy & Performance) (Introduced by the Executive Member for Policy and Performance)	Executive Cabinet	4 th October 2007

REVISION OF THE COUNCIL'S EQUALITY SCHEME

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To present a revised version of the Council's Equality Scheme to members for consideration and approval

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. That the proposed Equality Scheme is adopted

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

3. The Council is clear about its ambitions to become an excellent authority and continues to develop its customer first approach to business. Equality and diversity considerations are critical to the achievement of both of these aims, as equality and diversity is primarily an agenda which seeks to ensure that we are meeting all of the needs of our customers and communities, and equality and diversity is a critical element of the inspection regime.
4. The government has recently published a revised version of the Equality Standard for Local Government which sets out a number of new requirements for local authorities in responding to and progressing the equality and diversity agenda.
5. Prior to revision the Equality Standard had placed a requirement upon us to address ethnicity, disability and gender in our equality scheme. One of the key elements of the revised Equality Standard is its extension to cover age, sexuality and religion and to publish an equality scheme which addresses these elements of diversity.
6. It is also important that we translate a key national agenda into something which is meaningful and relevant to a Chorley context. Therefore rurality has been included as a seventh strand of diversity. This comes from an understanding of the place that is Chorley. As a Borough with significant rural areas it is important that when considering how best to work with our communities and meet the needs of our customers we account for the impact that living in rural areas can have on life chances, opportunities and access to services.
7. Therefore, Chorley Council's Equality Scheme has been revised and now covers seven strands of diversity. The three strands with which positive duties are associated (ethnicity, gender and disability), three which are nationally recognised, are covered to a greater or

lesser extent by various pieces of legislation and which are now enshrined in the equality standard (age, religion and sexuality) and one additional local strand of diversity, rurality.

8. Also included in the document is a revised relevance review. The relevance review is a process which allows us to assess how relevant each of our functions and policies are to the various strands of diversity set out in the scheme, this in turn allows us to prioritise the review of these functions and policies. The relevance review has been updated in line with the recent Business Process Architecture project that has enabled the organisation to refocus its business on becoming a customer first organisation.
9. Members are requested to approve this revised Equality Scheme for consultation with equality bodies and representatives.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

(If the recommendations are accepted)

10. To ensure that the Council is able to respond effectively to changes to the Equality Standard for Local Government and is recognised as an excellent and proactive organisation.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

11. None

CORPORATE PRIORITIES

12. This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

Put Chorley at the heart of regional economic development in the central Lancashire sub region		Improved access to public services	
Improving equality of opportunity and life chance	✓	Develop the character and feel of Chorley as a good place to live	
Involving People in their Communities		Ensure Chorley is a performing Organisation	✓

BACKGROUND

13. The Council published its first Equality Scheme in December 2006 to cover new statutory duties around disability and gender and to help the Council to progress its work around equality and diversity particularly in meeting the requirements of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
14. The Government has recently published a revised version of the Equality Standard for Local Government which sets out a number of new requirements for local authorities in responding to and progressing the equality and diversity agenda.

15. The Equality Standard highlights the importance of fair and equal treatment in local government services and employment and had been developed as a tool to enable authorities to mainstream gender, race and disability into Council policy and practice at all levels.
16. One of the key elements of the revised Equality Standard is its application to age, sexuality and religion and the associated requirement to publish an equality scheme which addresses these elements of diversity (as well as the pre existing ethnicity, gender and disability).
17. The standard provides a framework for improving equality practice and producing equitable outcomes in service delivery, employment and pay. The standard is a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI), and as such serves to integrate equalities policies and objectives with the Best Value Framework.
18. The Council is working to achieve Level Three of the Equality Standard by March 2009 (the revision of the Equality Standard also brings a new requirement of external validation at this level. This development is aligned with recent activity to develop a Central equalities and human rights body the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) to replace the Disability Rights Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and Equal Opportunities Commission.

THE REVISED EQUALITY SCHEME

19. In revising and re-publishing the Equality Scheme the Council is recognising that we must be swift in responding to this agenda and ensuring that we take a proactive approach to equality and diversity.
20. The revised Equality Scheme now covers seven strands of diversity. The three strands with which positive duties are associated (ethnicity, gender and disability), three which are nationally recognised, are covered to a greater or lesser extent by various pieces of legislation and which are now enshrined in the Equality Standard (age, religion and sexuality) and one additional local strand of diversity, rurality.
21. The decision to include rurality as a strand of diversity comes from an understanding of the place that is Chorley. As a Borough with significant rural areas it is important that when considering how best to work with our communities and meet the needs of our customers we account for the impact that living in rural areas can have.
22. Through publishing an overarching equalities scheme that brings together all activity associated with equality and diversity the agenda should be simplified and the Council will have a firm platform from which to progress its work around equality and diversity.
23. The document makes reference to the fact that the scheme is a living document, and we are currently undertaking a programme of equality impact assessments within directorates which will extend the action plan contained within the scheme to cover all seven strands of diversity.
24. The opportunity has been taken to make additional changes to update the scheme to cover changes in the process and to include additional information in the document.
25. The previously approved Equality Scheme included a section which set out how the Council intended to consult and communicate on equality and diversity issues. This has been removed as this section has been replaced by the Council's Consultation and Participation Strategy (the revised equality standard sets out a requirement to have in place a participation scheme which outlines how the Council will include quality target groups in the development of its functions and policies). Reference to the Strategy is now made in the

section of the document entitled 'How the Council Monitors Progress', and the Consultation and Participation Strategy can be accessed via the Loop or the Council's website.

26. Also included in the document is a revised relevance review. The relevance review is a process which allows us to assess how relevant each of our functions and policies are to the various strands of diversity set out in the scheme, this in turn allows us to prioritise the review of these functions and policies. The relevance review has been updated in line with the recent Business Process Architecture project that has enabled the organisation to refocus its Business on becoming a customer first organisation. Members are requested to approve this revised version for consultation with equality bodies and representatives.
27. The action-planning element of the scheme has also been amended to reflect the new organisational structure of the Council.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

28. This report has implications in the following areas:

Finance		Customer Services	
Human Resources		Equality and Diversity	✓
Legal			

LESLEY-ANN FENTON
ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

Report Author	Ext	Date	Doc ID
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