

**REPORT FOR: PERFORMANCE AND  
FINANCE SCRUTINY  
SUB-COMMITTEE**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	6 November 2012
<b>Subject:</b>	Corporate Equalities Objectives
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Alex Dewsnap Divisional Director Strategic Commissioning
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member area:</b>	All
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Enclosures:</b>	Appendix 1 - Single Equality Scheme Action Plan Appendix 2 – Corporate Equality Objectives

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

This report traces the development of Equalities policies in response to changes in legislation and best practice over recent years to show how the Council has responded and the progress made on the underlying issues which persist despite changes in terminology and describes the next steps in embedding equalities thinking and practice.

It also updates the committee on our ambition to seek an external accreditation against the Equality Framework for Local Government.

### **Recommendations:**

Performance and Finance committee are asked to:

- § note the progress made against the Single Equalities Scheme (SES) action plan (Appendix 1) and our Corporate Equality Objectives (Appendix 2);
- § Agree to receive annual reports on our progress against the Corporate Equality Objectives in order to quality assure and provide challenge to further improve our performance in mainstreaming equalities across the organisation.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Introduction**

1. Harrow is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse boroughs in London with people of many different backgrounds and life experiences living side by side. It is the richness of this diversity, and the positive impact that it has on the borough and the community, that helps make Harrow such a great place to live, work and visit. The borough's diversity is something to value and encourage and this report highlights the Council's commitment to maintaining and building on our strengths by ensuring equality and diversity is integral to everything we do.
2. Harrow's diverse population generates a range of needs and expectations all of which the Council needs to understand in order to provide appropriate services. As resources become scarcer, it is even more important to understand the community, their needs and aspirations and to be able to provide the right services at the right time.

### **Summary of our progress and some of the achievements made against the SES Action Plan**

3. On the 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010, Cabinet agreed the second Single Equalities Scheme (SES) which was a requirement of the previous Race, Disability and Gender Public Sector Equality Duties (PSEDs).
4. The Scheme provided a context within which the detailed requirements of the various duties were addressed. It also set a framework for the Council's equalities approach that, together with the programme of equality impact assessments and other specific actions, fulfilled the Council's responsibilities as well as engendering a positive and holistic response to equalities issues.
5. The SES included a three year action plan with six key objectives. A summary of the progress and achievements made against this can be found in **Appendix 1**.

### **Equality Impact Assessments**

6. In developing the SES, a comprehensive review was undertaken assessing all of the Council's functions, services and policies for relevance to the previous Equality Duties but also extending this to age, religion or belief and sexual orientation and developed a three year programme of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs).
7. However, due to changes in Service Plans, the delivery of this programme was inconsistent. Therefore, as part of the 2011/12 Service Planning process, Directorates were asked to develop Annual EqIA programmes aligned to their Service Plans where all key decisions were required to have an EqIA. This has been successful in that all key decisions taken by Cabinet have been supported by a summary of an EqIA. Compliance with the need to prepare EqIAs has improved and attention is now turning to the quality of assessments.

## **Equality Act 2010**

8. On 8 April 2010 the Equality Bill received Royal Assent and became the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act contains a range of new rights, powers and obligations to help the drive towards equality. The Act aims to strengthen and simplify the equality law that is already in place, such as the Race Relations Act and the Disability Discrimination Act.
9. The Equality Act 2010 introduced a new Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:
  - § Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
  - § Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
  - § Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
10. The new PSED replaces the previous three Public Sector Equality Duties – for race, disability and gender - and now covers the following protected characteristics:
  - § Age
  - § Disability
  - § Gender Reassignment
  - § Pregnancy and Maternity
  - § Race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
  - § Religion or Belief – this includes lack of belief
  - § Sex
  - § Sexual Orientation
11. It also applies to Marriage and Civil Partnership but only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination.
12. The PSED is supported by specific duties which are intended to help public authorities to meet its requirements. Public authorities covered by the specific duties are required to:

Publish by the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2012 and annually thereafter information to demonstrate their compliance with the general equality duty; and

Prepare and publish by 6 April 2012, and at least every four years thereafter one or more equality objectives.

## **Collate and Publish Equalities Information**

13. In order to meet the first requirement of the PSED, a number of local authorities have published spreadsheets containing equalities data about their service users and workforce, whilst others have agreed to continue to publish their annual equality in employment report relating to their

workforce and Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) as required by the previous duties.

14. Although this approach meets the requirements, the Council decided to publish its equalities data in a more constructive way.
15. In order to ensure that the data published is easy to understand and to ensure transparency with regard to progress in addressing inequality and delivering services reflective of the needs of our community, the Council prepared and published equalities information/data in the form of a narrative document 'Our Harrow, Our Story' which is available on our website (link below).

[http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality\\_and\\_diversity/2542/public\\_sector\\_equality\\_duty-equalities\\_datainformation](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/2542/public_sector_equality_duty-equalities_datainformation)

16. This is a narrative of the services and projects delivered by the Council which not only support the Corporate Priorities but address inequality, advance equality and foster good relations. The document includes real life case studies of service users and is supported by a set of Appendices which hold the data.

### **Developing and Publishing Equality Objectives**

In order to meet the second requirement of the PSED, 'Equality Objectives' (**Appendix 2**) were developed based on the research and consultation undertaken and the equalities information/data published.

17. The draft Equality Objectives were the subject of public consultation including an online questionnaire for staff and elected members and a separate questionnaire for members of the public, service users, voluntary and community groups, partners and stakeholders and the questionnaire was also sent out to the Residents Panel. As part of the consultation workshops for staff and voluntary and community groups, partners and stakeholders also took place. A cross party briefing was also held for elected members. The consultation produced support for the proposed Objectives which have been adopted by Cabinet.
18. The objectives support the Corporate Plan and progress towards them is measured by a number of indicators identified by Directorates through their Service Planning process.
19. The Corporate Equality Objectives have replaced the SES.

### **Reviewing Equality of Opportunity Policy**

20. The last Equal Opportunities policy was adopted in June 2002. Instead of reviewing this as a stand alone policy, it was incorporated into the SES in 2010. As the 'Equality Objectives' replaced the SES, a new Equality of Opportunity policy has been prepared and adopted to reflect all the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act.

21. The revised Equality of Opportunity policy (available on our website via the link below) reflects the requirements of the Equality Act and was subject to internal consultation including staff, elected members; staff support groups and the Trade Unions.

[http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality\\_and\\_diversity/2004/equality\\_of\\_opportunity\\_policy](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/2004/equality_of_opportunity_policy)

### **Measuring our Performance against the Corporate Equality Objectives**

22. The 'Objectives' support the Council's Corporate Priorities and the progress is measured against existing performance indicators from Directorate scorecards. The indicators used to monitor our performance against the Equality Objectives have been identified through the service planning process. Directorates were asked to highlight which indicators from their directorate scorecards will help to achieve the set objectives.
23. In line with the existing performance process, directorates will produce quarterly progress reports against their directorate scorecards for the Improvement Boards. These will form the basis of annual progress reports. This will not only mainstream equalities within existing processes and service plans but also adhere to the COUNT (collate once use numerous times) principle.

### **Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)**

- 24 The EFLG superseded the Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) and is a performance and improvement framework to enable local authorities to embed and mainstream equalities across the organisation. It builds on and develops the work councils have done on the old ESLG
- 25 The Council is currently at level 4 of the old ESLG. Level 4 of the old standard translates to the 'Achieving' level of the new framework. In adopting the SES, the Council made a commitment of working towards and achieving the 'Excellent' level of the new Framework.
- 26 There has since been a review of the EFLG, which was published in March 2012 and which has changed the framework substantially from the first edition. As a result of this review, there has been a pan-London round up of which Councils are seeking accreditation. Although a number of authorities have adopted the Framework to embed good practice, mainstream equalities and maintain the high visibility of equalities within their communities, Tower Hamlets Council is the only authority seeking re-accreditation.
- 27 Accreditation, while potentially recognising achievement against a fixed set of outcomes, only provides a snapshot of performance. It also costs in excess of £10,000 in fees and a significant amount in staff time gathering and collating information and evidence. An alternative approach and one favoured by a majority of London Boroughs is to adopt the Framework as a tool to measure on a continuous basis improvements and progress. This approach maintains momentum in mainstreaming equalities policy

and practice without the risk of focussing attention on an assessment to the detriment of sustained progress.

28 Although a decision to adopt this approach rests with Cabinet, discussions with the Portfolio Holder suggest that this is likely to be the recommended course of action. If it is adopted, it would be enormously helpful to be able to report progress annually to Overview and Scrutiny to invite challenge and seek advice on future action to move towards Excellence.

29 The adoption of stretching Equality Objectives, the transparency with which data has been and will continue to be provided and work to bring equalities performance within the remit of Improvement Board all demonstrates a commitment to the wider equalities agenda which would not be diminished by opting for an internal and ongoing challenge rather than a snapshot assessment.

### **Financial Implications**

30. All costs are contained within existing budgets.

### **Legal Implications**

31. Included in the body of the report

### **Environmental Impact**

32 There are no direct environmental impacts of this decision.

### **Risk Management Implications**

33 There are no direct risk management implications of this decision.

### **Equalities implications**

34 The 'Equality Objectives' will address inequality, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations and help the Council to comply with the statutory requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty introduced by the Equality Act 2010.

### **Corporate Priorities**

35. The 'Equality Objectives' support all the Council's Corporate Priorities as illustrated in Appendix 2.

### **Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance**

Name: Steve Tingle.

on behalf of the  
Chief Financial Officer

Date: 23 October 2012

Name: Jessica Farmer

on behalf of the  
Monitoring Officer

Date: 24 October 2012

### **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Mohammed Ilyas, Policy officer, Equality and Diversity Ext.2322

#### **Background Papers:**

Single Equalities Scheme Cabinet 15 December 2010

<http://moderngov:8080/documents/g60259/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Wednesday%2015-Dec-2010%2019.30,%20Cabinet.pdf?T=10>

'Our Harrow, Our Story'

[http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality\\_and\\_diversity/2542/public\\_sector\\_equality\\_duty-equalities\\_datainformation](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/2542/public_sector_equality_duty-equalities_datainformation)

Revised Equal Opportunities Policy

[http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality\\_and\\_diversity/2004/equality\\_of\\_opportunity\\_policy](http://www.harrow.gov.uk/info/200041/equality_and_diversity/2004/equality_of_opportunity_policy)