

# REPORT FOR: **CABINET**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	13 December 2012
<b>Subject:</b>	Equality Framework for Local Government
<b>Key Decision:</b>	No
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Graham Henson Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Decision subject to Call-in:</b>	Yes
<b>Enclosures:</b>	None

## Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the scope of the new Equalities Framework for Local Government and suggests how it can best be used to support the Council's continuing commitment to providing services that address the specific needs of all communities in Harrow

### **Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to:

Adopt the new Equalities Framework for Local Government as a tool to measure on a continuous basis, improvements and progress in equalities in addition to the specific measures set out in the Council's Equality Objectives; and

Agree not to seek external accreditation against the Framework.

**Reason: (For recommendation)**

To use of the Framework as a tool focuses on continuous improvement rather than to provide a snapshot assessment.

**Section 2 – Report****Introductory paragraph**

1. This report sets out the scope for the Equalities Framework for Local Government and suggests how it can best be used to support the Council's continuing commitment to the equalities agenda, and specifically ensuring that we consider the equalities implications of the decisions we take around service delivery. The report also sets out a recommendation not to pursue external accreditation, the reasons for which are set out in paragraphs 8-12.

**Options considered**

2. The options considered were not to use the Framework at all, which is not recommended as it represents current best practice and has been developed specifically to meet the needs of local government, and to seek accreditation against the Framework's scoring mechanism which is also not recommended for the reasons set out in this report.

**Background**

3. Guidance to local government on how best to approach equalities and diversity has been available for some years. Initially, the IDeA, supported by Government, issued an Equality Standard for Local Government which not only identified best practice but introduced an assessment process – both self assessment and external validation – to demonstrate progress by individual local authorities over time. The Standard mostly measured processes and data collection rather than outcomes and the impact of equality considerations on front line services and so it was superseded in 2011 by a new Equalities Framework developed and published by the Local Government Association.
4. The Framework itself was quickly the subject of review to ensure that it was consistent with the Equality Act 2010 which has been introduced in stages over the 18 months following its approval by Parliament.

## **Current situation**

5. The most recent iteration of the Framework was published earlier this year. It is based around 5 themes:
  - Knowing your community
  - Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment
  - Community Engagement and Satisfaction
  - Responsive Services and Customer Care and
  - Skilled and Committed Workforce.
  
6. It is designed to
  - inform decision making about services that aim to be more tailored to diverse needs;
  - contribute to the evidence base that underpins the reasons for changes to service policy and delivery – for example, why services are prioritised in the way they are;
  - help an organisation to enhance its reputation;
  - support and complement effective community engagement and empowerment;
  - help to promote high standards of customer care and insight;
  - provide a standard approach to the integration of equalities into service policy and planning and;
  - help organisations to meet their statutory duties.
  
7. As such, the Framework supports the Council's view that Equalities is about service improvement, that decisions are made on the basis of evidence and their impact is monitored, and that the specific needs of different communities and people who share protected characteristics are taken into account in service design and delivery. To achieve this, the Council needs the support of partners, a skilled and committed workforce and to collect and act on the views of the community.

## **Why a change is needed**

8. Back in December 2010, Cabinet reaffirmed an earlier decision to seek accreditation as "Excellent" against the Framework by March 2012. Subsequently, this decision was varied because the amended Framework's publication was significantly delayed, to seek accreditation by March 2013.
  
9. The new Framework, although helpful in giving expression to aspirations and concrete examples of excellence, is closely related to older style inspection regimes. This means that, to prepare for accreditation, substantial amounts of evidence need to be gathered, taking staff away from their normal duties. The outcome of accreditation – whether successful or not – provides only a snapshot of progress on a journey and can lead to complacency if the authority is rated as Excellent. Accreditation also costs in excess of £10,000, a sum for which there is currently no identified budget provision.

10. A survey of London Boroughs undertaken after the new Framework was published revealed that only one is seeking or plans to seek accreditation but that the majority have or are planning to adopt the Framework as a guide to the development of their Equalities work.
11. At their meeting on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2012, the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee have been asked to challenge and critique the Council's Equalities performance using the Framework's description of excellence as a yardstick to show progress over time. While this work could support an accreditation bid, it would be of more continuing use as an ongoing method of assessing progress. The Committee indicated at this meeting that they would be happy to receive the annual report on the Equality Objectives and act in the role of challenging the Council's progress against the Equalities Framework.
12. The Council's adoption of stretching Equality Objectives, the transparency with which data has been and will continue to be published 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.

## **Implications of the Recommendations**

### **Legal Implications**

13. There are no legal implications as a result of the recommendations.

### **Financial Implications**

- 14 The proposal to not seek accreditation for Excellence will save the Council in the region of £10,000, although this is not currently budgeted for so in effect removes a potential future pressure.

### **Performance Implication**

15. The Council reports against the Equality Objectives through the Strategic Performance Report and the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Sub-Committee has also considered progress to date at its November meeting. The proposal to use Scrutiny to challenge and critique the Council's Equalities performance using the Framework's description of excellence as a yardstick has been welcomed and will assist the Council in its journey towards mainstreaming equalities.

### **Environmental Impact**

16. There are no implications.

## Risk Management Implications

17. There are no risk implications.

## Equalities implications

18. There are corporate equalities implications as a result of this report, but they are set out in the report.

## Corporate Priorities

19. This report addresses the following Council corporate priorities:

- United and involved communities: A Council that listens and leads.
- Supporting and protecting people who are most in need.

## Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Steve Tingle.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 28 November 2012		
Name: Jessica Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 3 December 2012		

## Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Alex Dewsnap	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Divisional Director Strategic Commissioning
Date: 28 November 2012		

## Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards



Divisional Director  
(Environmental  
Services)

Date: 28 November 2012

## Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

**Contact:** Mike Howes, Service Manager, Policy and Partnerships 020 8420 9637

### Background Papers:

Equalities Framework for Local Government

[http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=d6f829f1-2fbf-4c72-81ae-8c843b9b43a8&groupId=10171](http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=d6f829f1-2fbf-4c72-81ae-8c843b9b43a8&groupId=10171)

Single Equalities Scheme report to Cabinet 15<sup>th</sup> December 2010

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

**Call-In Waived by the  
Chairman of Overview  
and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**NOT APPLICABLE**

*[Call-in applies]*