

Meeting:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date:	29 January 2007
Subject:	Level 4 - Equality Standard for Local Government
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Director of People Performance & Policy
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Anjana Patel
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	None

SECTION 1 – SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Equality Standard for Local Government is a framework that sets up a way of working within local authorities, which makes mainstreaming equalities into service delivery and employment an issue for all aspects of the council's work. Using five levels it introduces a comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equalities covering all aspects of policy-making, service delivery and employment.

Harrow has achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard and is committed to achieving Level 4 by the end of 2006/07.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To note the Council's process for assessment against Level 4 of the Equality Standard.

SECTION 2 - REPORT

Brief History

2.1 The Equality Standard for Local Government (the Standard) was developed by Local Government Employers in partnership with the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. It was launched in 2001 and is now adopted by 90% of all local authorities.

2.2 The Standard recognises the importance of fair and equal treatment in local government services and employment and was developed primarily as a tool to enable local authorities to mainstream age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation into council policy and practice at all levels

2.3 The Standard is a self-assessment tool that councils can use to measure their own progress, it is also a Best Value Performance Indicator – councils report what level of the Standard they have reached. Local authorities are able to assess their progress based on five levels:

- Level 1:** Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality Policy
- Level 2:** Assessment and Consultation
- Level 3:** Setting equality objectives and targets
- Level 4:** Information systems and monitoring against targets
- Level 5:** Achieving and reviewing outcomes

Harrow assessed itself as having achieved Level 3 in March 2006. This self-assessment was subject to an independent audit/review and confirmed by an external assessor.

2.4 Harrow's assessment for 2005/06 and targets for 2006/07 and 2007/08 are reported in the Best Value Performance Plan Supplement 2005/06. Harrow has a target of achieving Level 4 by the end of 2006/07.

Achieving Level 4 of the Standard

2.5 Level 4 of the Standard is concerned with information systems and monitoring against targets. To achieve level 4 Harrow will have to demonstrate that:

- We have developed information and monitoring systems that allow progress to be assessed in achieving targets
- Targets are realistic and achievable and that our action plans are clear
- We are measuring progress against targets and effectively using our information and monitoring systems
- We are producing monitoring reports at specified intervals and which are circulated to designated consultation and scrutiny groups
- Our monitoring systems are providing useful information about progress towards specific targets

2.6 Examples of evidence of information systems and monitoring against targets include:

- Documentation giving details of monitoring for specific performance indicators
- Monitoring reports on each specified performance indicator
- Report to community and employee representatives in line with Best Value process
- Documentary evidence of time-series monitoring reports on indicators
- Review of series of monitoring reports and consideration of progress
- Quantitative and qualitative consumer feedback

2.7 To demonstrate achievement the Council will be able to draw on the following sources of evidence:

- Equality performance scorecard
- Council's Annual Equality Reports
- Equality Impact Assessments and Action Plans
- Reports to the Corporate Equality Group
- MORI Quality of Life survey

2.8 The published guidance that accompanies the Standard includes an audit and self-assessment checklist. This checklist will be used to collect relevant evidence for Harrow's self-assessment.

The Corporate Equality Group will review the self-assessment and the result will be reported in the Best Value Performance Plan 2006/07

Revised Equality Standard

2.9 The Standard was reviewed in 2005/06 and a revised Standard is due to be introduced early in 2007. Within the revised Standard, there will be a requirement that local authorities reporting level 3 or level 5 have undertaken an agreed external assessment.

Options considered

2.10 Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 2a measures councils' progress against the Equality Standard and is monitored by the Audit Commission. Harrow has set targets for and reports performance against the Standard. Failure to continue to report progress against the Equality Standard will adversely affect the Council's Corporate Assessment.

External assessment

2.11 The revised Standard will require an external assessment at Level 3 and 5. Harrow has had its Level 3 assessment reviewed by an external assessor and therefore a further external assessment is not proposed until Level 5.

Consultation

2.12 The Council's targets and performance against key equality indicators including the Equality Standard are the subjects of reports to the Corporate Equality Group and Employees Consultative Forum, which are subject to consultation with internal and external stakeholders.

Financial Implications

2.13 Any staffing costs will be contained within approved budgets and no additional resources are sought as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

2.14 Assessing progress against the Standard will help to ensure that the council complies with its statutory duties under equalities legislation.

Equalities Impact

2.15 The Standard is a self-assessment tool that Harrow uses to measure its progress in mainstreaming age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation into council policy and practice at all levels. Progress in achieving the Standard will assist the Council achieve its equality targets and objectives

SECTION 3 - STATUTORY OFFICER CLEARANCE

Chief Finance Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Name: Barry Evans Date: 16 January 2007
Monitoring Officer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Name: Stephen Dorrian Date: 16 January

SECTION 4 - CONTACT DETAILS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

Contact: Jon Turner, Head of HR – 020 8424 1225

Background Papers:

Best Value Performance Plan Supplement 2005/06

IF APPROPRIATE, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES/ NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES / NO
3.	Manifesto Pledge Reference Number	