

REPORT FOR: **CABINET**

Date of Meeting:	14 September 2010
Subject:	Single Equalities Scheme (SES)
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek, Corporate Director Adults and Housing Tom Whiting, Assistant Chief Executive
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Graham Henson, Portfolio Holder for Performance, Customer Services and Corporate Services
Exempt:	No
Decision subject to Call-in:	Yes
Enclosures:	Draft Single Equalities Scheme and Consultation document <i>(Due to the size of the document, it has been circulated to Cabinet Members, other key Members and officers only. A hard copy has been placed in the Members' Library, and the document has been published with the agenda to allow it to be viewed on the website.)</i>

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report brings to the Cabinet's attention the draft Single Equalities Scheme (SES) and the public consultation on the scheme. The SES covers the Council's approach to taking forward the six equality strands and working towards the excellent level of the new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to note the draft Single Equalities Scheme and endorse the consultation on the draft.

Reason: to comply with the Council's obligations under the Equalities legislation and Public Equality Duties.

Section 2 – Report

The Council developed and published its first Single Equalities Scheme (SES) in 2007, and it is now due to be reviewed and updated. At the same time, the new Equalities Act 2010 introduces additional statutory requirements. The advent of the new duties and the need to review our existing Scheme has prompted this SES.

The Single Equalities Scheme addresses the existing equality strands:

- Race;
- Gender;
- Disability;
- Age;
- Religion or belief; and
- Sexual orientation.

It also deals with the proposed seventh equality strand, Socio-economic deprivation, that has been identified in the Equality Act 2010, although it is not yet known when the part of the Act making this strand active will be made operational.

Harrow is a borough with a very diverse population, particularly in terms of ethnicity and religion and belief, and this 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 and their needs and aspirations to be able to get services right first time and at the minimum cost. The scheme provides a framework for helping to appreciate the characteristics of our community and, at the same time, addressing the various equality duties.

The first stage of consultation on the SES took place for 8 weeks in March/April this year and this included an online questionnaire for residents, service users, voluntary and community sector, staff, elected members and trade unions. In addition, two focus groups were held for staff, one at the offices of Harrow Association of Disabled People for all disability groups within the Borough and another at the offices of Harrow Association of Voluntary

Services (HAVS) for all other community and voluntary groups in Harrow. The consultation was also publicised on the HAVS website and an email with a link was sent to all the voluntary and community groups on HAVS database.

The Policy Officer for Equalities and Diversity also attended a number of meetings to discuss and raise awareness on the SES and consultation which included the Staff Black Workers Group, Staff Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Group, Harrow Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Forum and the Older Peoples Reference Group. A summary of the consultation results is attached in **Appendix 1**.

A high level assessment was also undertaken against the 'Excellent' criteria of the Equality Framework for Local Government to establish the Council's position and identify areas for improvement to achieve this accreditation. The findings from this assessment and the feedback and comments received from the consultation have informed the draft Single Equalities Scheme and the proposed cross cutting objectives of the Scheme, which are to:

- Develop a modern and diverse workforce to reflect the community we serve;
- Improve the data the council has on its residents and service users so all decisions can be taken and services developed in light of strong intelligence;
- Ensure of residents, service users and staff can influence through effective communication and community engagement;
- Deliver responsive services and customer care and increase customer satisfaction;
- Reduce inequalities through corporate commitment and partnership working;
- Promote diversity and community cohesion both within the council and the borough.

Equalities Act

The new Equalities Act, 2010 builds on the duties that require local authorities (and others) to eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity in relation to race, disability and gender issues. The new Single Public Equality Duty incorporates all of the existing duties but extends the range of our obligations to include issues relating to Age, Religion or Belief, Transgender, Sexual Orientation and Socio-economic deprivation.

The comments, suggestions and actions that were gathered through the first stage of consultation have now been considered and, where appropriate, added into the current draft of the Scheme. This will again be the subject to consultation which began on 6th September and will continue until 31st October. The consultation will include an online questionnaire which will be open to all residents, service users, voluntary / community groups, businesses, partners, stakeholders, staff and elected members.

The consultation will be publicised through a press release, articles in Harrow People, The Arrow, The Grapevine and departmental newsletters. It will also

be publicised through links with voluntary and community groups such as HAD, Harrow Interfaith Forum and Harrow LGBT Forum amongst others. A copy of the online questionnaire is attached in **Appendix 2**.

Following the second stage consultation on the SES, the Scheme will be finalised, agreed by the Corporate Strategy Board (CSB), the Corporate Equalities Group (CEG) and presented to Cabinet in December 2010 with a request for approval for implementation.

Options considered

The Council could have separate schemes for each Equality Strand. This was the pattern for addressing equalities issues prior to 2007 when the view was taken that bringing the strands together made a greater impact as well as making it easier to access the Council's equalities policies and proposals for action. These arguments still hold and a single scheme has again been prepared.

Legal Implications

In relation to Race, Disability and Gender equality the Council is legally required to publish an equality scheme. Regulations set out certain matters which must be included in such a scheme. The Single Equality Act introduces a new Single Public Equality Duty incorporating the existing diversity strands (Race, Disability and Gender) but extending this to include Age, Transgender, Religion or Belief, Sexual Orientation and Socio Economic inequality. Failure to publish such a scheme can lead to enforcement action by the relevant commission (Equality and Human Rights Commission).

Equalities implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been initiated for the SES but can only be completed following the second stage consultation and will form part of the Cabinet report for Dec 2011 when Cabinet will be requested to enforce the final SES for implementation.

Financial Implications

The costs of the consultation associated with the proposal can be met from existing budgets. The proposed actions contained within the scheme will be the subject of a further report to Cabinet in December. Any costs identified will be included within the Council's proposals for the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Performance Issues

The principle measure of performance in equalities will be the level that the Council achieves against the new equalities framework for local government. There are three levels - emerging, achieving and excellent – and the Council is committed to seeking to achieve excellence by March 2012.

The actions set out in the SES are designed to achieve this target.

Environmental Impact

None.

Risk Management Implications

None.

Corporate Priorities

The SES will support our corporate priorities by improving support for vulnerable people and building stronger communities by demonstrating our services are fair, equitable and accessible and where possible enhance and adapt our services to cater for people with special needs such as a disability.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Steve Tingle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 26 August 2010		
Name: George Curran	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 25 August 2010		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Alex Dewsnap	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Divisional Director Partnership, Development and Performance
Date: 25 August 2010		

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: John Edwards



Divisional Director,
Environmental Services

Date: 23 August 2010

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Mohammed Ilyas, Policy Officer, Equalities and Diversity, Ext 2322

Background Papers:

The Council's Single Equality Scheme 2007

The Equality Framework for Local Government

The Equality Act 2007

Consultation responses from the first stage of consultation

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

NOT APPLICABLE