

**REPORT FOR: OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
AND SCRUTINY SUB-
COMMITTEES**

Date of Meeting:	27 th January 2011
Subject:	Single Equalities Scheme
Responsible Officer:	Paul Najsarek – Corporate Director: Adults and Housing Tom Whiting – Assistant Chief Executive
Scrutiny Lead Member area:	All
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Single Equalities Scheme Equality Impact Assessment

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the final draft Single Equalities Scheme which covers the Council's approach to taking forward the protected characteristics (Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex and Sexual Orientation) under the Equality Act 2010 and working towards the excellent level of the new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) with a view of achieving the excellent accreditation by March 2012.

Cabinet has recommended the scheme to Council for approval.

Recommendations:

That Overview and Scrutiny members provide feedback and comment on the SES.

Section 2 – Report

Introductory paragraph

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, their needs and aspirations and 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 statutory Public Equality Duties.

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. In addition, the SES will also assist the Council to achieve the excellent level under the EFLG.

The Scheme provides a context within which the detailed requirements of the various duties will be addressed. It sets the framework for the Council's equalities approach that, together with the programme of equality impact assessments and other specific actions, will fulfil the Council's responsibilities as well as engendering a positive and holistic response to equalities issues.

Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

The SES has been developed against the EFLG and will also assist the Council to achieve the highest (excellent) level of the framework.

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. It also:

- focuses more on outcomes and service improvements rather than processes;
- will enable authorities to take account of local needs and circumstances;
- integrates the public duties of race, disability and gender;
- highlights the role of local authorities and partners in challenging inequality in their communities;

Our progress

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. The Council has now set itself a target of achieving the 'Excellent' level of the new framework by March 2012.

An internal assessment against the requirements of the 'Excellent' level was undertaken to establish our position as well as identifying gaps. This included a workshop with members of the Corporate Equalities Group (CEG) and evidence templates submitted by the key corporate areas reflecting the

performance areas under the Framework. . Each directorate was also asked to assess their areas against the excellent criteria to establish potential areas for improvement and identify actions to incorporate in SES Action Plan.

The findings from these assessments and the feedback and comments received from the consultation have informed the draft SES 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 that residents, service users and staff can influence decisions through effective communication and engagement;
- Deliver responsive services, improve 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.

The SES has been based around the five performance areas of the EFLG to assist the Council to achieve the 'Excellent' level of the Framework.

Benefits of achieving excellence

Achieving 'excellence' will not only support the council's vision and embed equalities in the Better Deal for Residents Programme, but will also have many other benefits, which include:

- Ensuring we have an in depth knowledge and understanding of our communities and their specific needs so our services are tailored around the needs and requirements of our service users;
- Helping to demonstrate that unavoidable spending reductions have been determined as fairly as possible;
- Ensuring our services for both staff and service users are fair, equal and accessible;
- Contributing significantly to delivering efficient and improved services;
- Embedding Equality Impact Assessments in service development and the council's transformation programme, resulting in improved and accessible services;
- Working in partnership to tackle inequalities within the borough resulting in better life chances for all;
- Enhancing the council's reputation for being recognised as championing equality and diversity and promoting community cohesion;
- Contributing towards other performance frameworks;
- Increasing satisfaction levels of our staff, residents and service users;
- Increasing satisfaction for staff and members as being part of a reputable organisation championing equality and diversity;
- Fulfilling legal requirements.

The purpose of the EFLG is to mainstream and embed equalities in all our functions and services. This will also support our BDFR Programme to ensure we understand our communities and their needs; consult and engage with our service users and deliver responsive services and customer care more effectively and efficiently.

Financial Implications

The proposed actions contained within the SES form part of current or developing Directorate Service Plans which are the basis for budget preparation. The SES action plan has been developed through Service Improvement Plans and contributions from directorates. The financial costs will be contained within existing budgets.

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 action plan within the SES will contribute to achieving this target. To monitor performance and implementation of the SES, an annual progress report on the SES action plan will be submitted to the Corporate Equalities Group (CEG), CSB, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Environmental Impact

There are no direct environmental impacts of this decision, but the extension of the duties to include socio-economic deprivation is relevant to work associated with affordable warmth and fuel poverty.

Risk Management Implications

There are no direct risk management implications of this decision.

Equalities implications

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the SES which has not highlighted any potential adverse impact but the SES and the action plans will not only meet the specific requirements of the Public Equality Duties but ensure our services are fair and equitable and improve our services.

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 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Mohammed Ilyas, Policy Officer – Equalities and Diversity 0208 424 1322

Background Papers: None