

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 4 APRIL 2012

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 15 MARCH 2012

Corporate Equality Objectives

The Committee welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Performance, Corporate Services and Customer Services to its meeting. An Officer then gave a brief presentation of the report outlining the inherent elements of the Single Equality Scheme and that this would be brought to a close at the completion of the report stage. He then set out the Council's Equal Opportunity Policy and proposals concerning Corporate Equality Objectives which were a requirement under the Public Sector Equality Duty, arising from the Equalities Act 2010. It was advised that the timeline for the approval of the objectives was very constrained as all Councils had a statutory responsibility to publish these by the 8 April 2012.

Speaking on the proposed draft Equality Objectives, the officer advised that these had been subject to a consultation process utilising the Council's Residents Panel. Of the 1,152 members of the Panel, 652 returns had been received and all proposed objectives had met a majority support threshold. It was anticipated that the full details of the response outcomes would be included in the Cabinet report to consider the adoption of the Equality Objectives.

In response to questions it was advised that:

- The Council was legally obliged to put in place Equality Objectives and that Harrow had worked to ensure its objectives were synchronous with the overall corporate objectives to better promote the mainstreaming of equalities.
- It was agreed that the Council's longer term aim should be that equalities was a fundamental aspect of the Council but, also recognised that the authority had some issues to resolve and that the proposed objectives would invigorate a sharper focus on this area.
- The reflection of the Objectives with regard to the councillor and senior officer leadership of the authority remained a challenge. However, the Council was proactive in its efforts to promote applications from under-represented groups whilst also remaining legally obliged to appoint the best candidate for a role.
- Concerning the SES Action Plan, officers agreed that the outcomes read as statements and that this was the reason for discontinuing this approach. The Council now wished to move to a position of much more tightly controlled and measureable Equality Objectives. Officers were in discussion with departments concerning the setting of percentage measure targets to ensure that clear objectives and outcomes were put in place.

- The Residents' Panel was a Group of residents who had volunteered to respond to written communications approximately 3-4 times per year. There was no incentivisation provided as part of this membership.
- With regard to the view that the report should be resubmitted to the Committee in a more complete format containing all responses information, it was advised that due to the legal timeline placed on the publication of Equality Objectives this was not achievable. However, the targets being put in place were anticipated to be for a one year period and there would be opportunity to continue to feed into the objectives / performance management going forward.
- A pattern within the responses had indicated less support for "protected groups" with regard to budget cuts impacts.
- Officers agreed to revisit the comment concerning working in partnership with Trade Unions as its intention was to reflect that when the Council was developing a policy it would work to ensure Unions and staff were aware of the proposal and appropriately communicated with.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the above comments submitted to the Cabinet as part of its considerations.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Report submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 March 2012

Draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 15 March 2012

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