

Area North Committee – 26 January 2011

9. Equalities Update Report

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Purpose of the Report

To provide members with information on the equalities work within SSDC and our duties under the new Equality Act

Public Interest

This report provides information on the Equality Act 2010, and how this will be implemented by the council.

Recommendation

This report is for information and comment.

Background

Single Equality Scheme

'We remain committed to promoting equality, recognising and valuing diversity, and respecting the principles of human rights. The Single Equality Scheme presents our vision and approach to ensuring equal life chances for all.

We believe that everyone in our local communities has the right to be safe and protected from harm, to be treated fairly and with dignity, to live the life of choice, and to take an active part in the community. These fundamental principles of human rights are at the very core of our service delivery. This means that everyone should have equal access to our services and the right to be treated fairly by those services.

The Single Equality Scheme brings together the significant progress in equality and diversity that the district has achieved over the last three years and builds upon it. This means going beyond our legal responsibilities for equalities in the areas of service delivery, employment and working practices.' (Mark Williams Chief Executive, Tim Carroll Council Leader)

- The Single Equality Scheme, (SES), sets out our key equality objectives; the Equalities Action Plan sets out how we will meet those targets. The SES Action Plan is monitored by Management Board and Scrutiny every six months.
- The SES was adopted by District Executive and Full Council in February 2010.

For more information:

<http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/communities/equality-and-diversity/our-vision---single-equality-scheme>

South Somerset Corporate Equalities Steering Group

In order for us to ensure that our services, strategies and policies are meeting the different needs of our local communities we carry out Equality Impact Assessments, (EIAs). The Equality Impact Assessments check that decisions and activities we undertake do not disadvantage different groups; currently consideration is given to disability, race, gender, age, rurality, religion and belief, gender reassignment and sexual orientation

The Equality Impact Assessment process was subject to a managed audit carried out by the South West Audit Partnership. I am pleased to report that we achieved a 'comprehensive assurance' rating, a level not often awarded.

(Examples of how the EIAs and our equalities work have made a difference to our communities will be illustrated in a powerpoint presentation.)

The South Somerset Corporate Equalities Steering Group (SSCESG) has the responsibility for overseeing the successful functioning of the Equality Impact Assessment process, and provides a steer in our approach to equalities work.

The SSCESG is now well established and is chaired by the Theme Advisor for Equality and Social Inclusion. The group has representation from a number of voluntary, community groups and equality strands.

The Equality Framework for Local Government

A key tool for measuring our progress in mainstreaming equalities is the Equality Framework for Local Government, (EFLG) 2009. The framework concentrates on five areas of change management:

- Knowing your community and equality mapping
- Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A modern and diverse workforce

The Framework comprises of three levels of performance:

- Developing- level 1
- Achieving - level 2
- Excellent - level 3

By completing the outcomes of the SES Action Plan, we aim to reach the Achieving level by 2011; it is envisaged that we will work towards becoming an Excellent authority in 2012.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010, received Royal Assent in April 2010. The majority of the Act came into force in October 2010, and the rest will be implemented gradually over the next few years. The Act harmonises and extends existing equalities law. It aims to make it more consistent, clearer and easier to follow in order to make society fairer. The Act emphasises how central equalities considerations are to public service planning and delivery. It will be essential for all public bodies to consider and to document equalities issues at every decision that they take.

Our responsibilities

As an organisation that provides a service to the public, the Act applies to SSDC in respect of all of our functions.

A public authority **must**, in the exercise of its functions, have **due regard** to –

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimization
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share it

We must –

- remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic or that are connected to that characteristic
- take steps to meet the needs of those persons
- encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low
- meet the needs of disabled persons, in particular, take steps that take account of disabled persons' disabilities
- tackle prejudice and promote understanding

New aspects of the 2010 Act

The Equality Act 2010 brings together equality law by:

- Putting a new integrated **Equality Duty** on public bodies (April 2011)
- Using **public procurement** to improve equality
- Banning **age discrimination** outside the workplace (2012)
- Requiring **gender pay** and employment equality publishing (2013)
- Extending the scope to use **positive action**
- Strengthening the **powers of employment tribunals**
- Protecting **carers** from discrimination
- Clarifying the protection for **breastfeeding mothers**
- Banning discrimination in **private members' clubs**
- Strengthening protection from discrimination for **disabled people**
- Protecting people from **dual discrimination** - direct discrimination because of a combination of two protected characteristics

The SES has been written in line with the requirements of the Equality Act and the Equality Framework for Local Government, this includes identifying our key priority equality objectives and how we are going to meet them.

Role of councillors

Councillors are an integral part of the equality and diversity process of the Council, playing a crucial role in meeting our responsibilities under the equalities legislation. Elected members represent residents from our local communities and can have a big impact on the equality of opportunity that residents experience through their everyday activities. This includes communicating with/about local people, meeting their needs and the Council's decision-making and scrutiny functions especially with regard to service provision.

Training for staff and members

A planned programme of equalities training has been arranged for SSDC staff, to begin in the new year. Equalities training for newly elected Councillors will take place in July 2011, (although all members will be welcome to attend).

Members should note the summary document 'Equality Act 2010: What Do I Need To Know? A summary Guide For Public Sector Organisations' as background information – attached as Appendix A.

For further information:

http://www.equalities.gov.uk/equality_bill.aspx

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/new-equality-act-guidance/>

Equality Champions

An Equalities Champions Group has recently been set up. The group is made up of SSDC representatives from all Directorates and meets quarterly.

The objectives of the Equality Champions Group:

- To ensure effective and coordinated action on equalities
- To reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequality
- To promote diversity and fairness

Local Development Framework Consultation

Public engagement on the draft Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework has been co-ordinated by the four Area Development Teams in close working arrangements with the Community Cohesion Officer and Spatial Planning team. In designing the public engagement, the main focus has been on:

1) Young People

A series of events were held in November 2010 at schools and colleges. The method chosen was to meet with groups of young people and hold a structured discussion around the growth proposals overall, a more in-depth look at key policies areas and seek some specific feedback on local growth proposals in the catchment area of the school. Four such events were held:

- Ansford School, Castle Cary, 80 young people across Years 7, 8 and 9
- Bucklers Mead School, 30 pupils from Year 8
- Yeovil College, 15 pupils studying A-level geography
- Huish Episcopi Academy, Langport 30 pupils from Year 11

2) Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

This was arranged through the Somerset Black Development Agency and consisted of a discussion group held with 16 representatives from black and ethnic communities across South Somerset.

3) Gypsy and Travellers

A focus group was held with a group of gypsy and traveller representatives from across the district. Participants had been sent a copy of the summary leaflet in

advance of the meeting and on the day there was a discussion about the housing needs of gypsy and traveller people and views were sought on the draft policy for gypsy and traveller development.

4) South Somerset Equalities Steering Group

A discussion group was held with representatives from the Corporate Equalities Steering Group, which includes disability groups, groups representing older/young people, faith groups, black and minority ethnic etc.

Each of these sessions have been written up and submitted as separate evidence as part of the consultation process.

Financial Implications

None from this report.

Corporate Priority Implications

Theme 4:- Ensure Safe, Sustainable and Cohesive Communities

SSDC corporate plan key target areas:

4.16 Outcome: An empowered community where all people take part in shaping their neighbourhood. Measured by: Increasing % of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood (NI 2).

4.17 Increase % of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.

4.18 Increase perceptions that people in the area treat one another with respect and consideration.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

None

Equality and Diversity Implications

The South Somerset Corporate Equalities Group were fully consulted in the preparation of this report.

Background Papers: Equality Act 2010: What Do I Need To Know? A summary Guide For Public Sector Organisations