

Scrutiny Committee – 11th September 2008

9. Corporate Equalities Strategy Progress Report

Portfolio Holder: Ric Pallister, Housing, Environmental Health & Inclusion
Director: Rina Singh, Corporate Director (Communities)
Head of Service: Andrew Gillespie, Head of Area Development (West)
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Purpose of the report

To report progress in the implementation of the Corporate Equalities Action Plan.

Action Required

The Scrutiny Committee is requested to note and comment on progress.

Background

Progress in the implementation of the Corporate Equalities Strategy was last reported to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2007. At that time members expressed their full support for the implementation of the strategy and asked that a further progress report be made to them in 10 months time.

The Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) was published in 2001. Its purpose was to assist local authorities to mainstream equality issues in service delivery, acting as a benchmark for quality assurance.

The Corporate Equalities Strategy, based on the ESLG was adopted by the District Executive in November 2006. The aim of the strategy is to:

1. Improve customer care by promoting anti-discriminatory practices at a corporate, service and individual level.
2. Engage with communities and staff in order to better meet local needs, priorities and aspirations.
3. Develop equalities targets which are relevant and can be measured, to ensure long term improvements.
4. Embed a culture of ensuring that all groups of the community have fair and equal access to Council services.
5. Regularly monitor and evaluate policies and practices to ensure Equality Standards are being met.

The strategy recognises that SSSC can already point to many examples of good practice in relation to these aims, but also that it is important to subject our services to a systematic review through an Equalities Impact Assessment. This ensures that good practice continues and is improved to deal with new patterns of migration, the changing make up of our communities and changing expectations of customer service

Is the Strategy making a difference?

Our agreed Service Equality Impact Assessment process was described in previous reports. It involves an element of external scrutiny and advice from the South Somerset Corporate

Equalities Steering Group. Membership of this group is made up of representatives of the six equality strands.

The group is chaired by SSDC theme advisor for Social Inclusion and Equalities, Councillor Ann Campbell. For the year May 07-May 08 we were able to cover the following services:-

Customer Services
Sport Art Leisure
Countryside, Heritage and Tourism
Area Development
Housing
Streetscene
Communications Service
Licensing and Civil Contingency
Procurement and Office Services.

For the year June 08-09, the programme is –

Revenues and Benefits	-June
Housing and Welfare	-June
HR and Performance	-August
Economic Development Planning and Transport	-August
Engineering and Property Services	-October
Environmental Health Enforcement	-October
Sustainable Community Strategy	-December
Development and Building Control	-December
Finance	-February
E Government & Technology	-February
Community Safety	-April
Legal and Democratic Services	-April

The Equalities Impact Assessment process encourages systematic examination by staff about the provision of access to services.

It is unlikely to result in major shifts of emphasis, but it is leading to many minor changes. This in itself is helping to further mainstream equalities issues into service provision for our customers and citizens.

For example;

- A number of services have now appointed their own equalities champions so that the focus on equalities issues is not lost.
- The Home Aid Service has introduced a new clipboard for case workers that contains a portable hearing loop. The clipboard picks up the spoken word via a microphone and transmits this to a hearing aid. It enables clients with hearing difficulties to hear more effectively and to have a much clearer understanding of their case.
- Economic Development now recognise limited involvement with the Muslim Cultural Association and are now discussing better access to services with them.

Undertaking the impact assessments has been supported through the establishment of an officer working group. The group is beginning to share good practice across all services and

identify corporate policies and practices that could benefit from a common approach and/or the development of a new policy.

Completed Equality Impact Assessments are published on the SSDC website under SSDC/Community/Equality and Diversity.

Community Cohesion Officer

Permanent recruitment to this post has still not been achieved. The Corporate Equalities Strategy has been driven forward by a number of temporary measures, drawing resources from other council priorities. Whilst much progress has been made, a permanent appointment remains the key to sustainable improvement.

We intend to complete a new recruitment exercise by December 2008.

Background Papers: *Corporate Equalities Strategy*
