

Committee: Council

Date: 17 April 2007

Title: The Council's Equalities and Inclusion Policy

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Agenda Item

13

Item for
Decision

Summary

- 1 Following legislation and audit criteria for Local Authorities, in 2006 the Council determined to achieve The Equality Standard Level 2 by December 2008.
- 2 Under the 'Diversity in the Districts Scheme', which is a scheme for smaller Districts requiring additional support in meeting their Duties, the Council has worked during 2006 with a DIALOG consultant who has provided guidance on how best to tackle the challenge.
- 3 The attached Uttlesford District Council Equalities and Inclusion Policy, and the statutory Race Equality and the Disability Equality Schemes are currently undergoing both internal and external consultation. The documents will be continually under review and revision, to reflect feedback and ongoing update.
- 4 The purpose of this Report is to introduce the new Uttlesford District Council Equalities and Inclusion Policy, in the context of the wider equalities framework
- 5 The Policy has been presented for approval at this stage in order to speed up the Council's ability to achieve The Equality Standard Level 1 and progress towards Level 2.

Recommendations

- 6 That Members adopt the Uttlesford District Council Equalities and Inclusion Policy, subject to further consultation.

Background Papers

- 7 Uttlesford District Council Equalities and Inclusion Policy (see separate document)
- 8 Uttlesford District Council, Report of Progress against The Equality Standard for Local Government, March 2007, DIALOG Consultant's Report (see separate document)

Impact

Communication/Consultation	A consultation exercise in the community is being arranged.
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Community Safety	Community Safety Officer has been consulted on the contents of the Equalities and Inclusion Policy.
Equalities	Positive effect on equalities; HR involved.
Finance	Resources will be required both for training across the organisation and for some consultancy. A limited budget has been allocated for 2007-8. There is no budget for further years, in terms of cost of consultation and resource implications.
Human Rights	Human Rights will be enhanced as a result of the this proposal
Legal implications	All relevant legislation has been considered and acted upon.
Sustainability	No impact on sustainable issues relating to either the council or the community.
Ward-specific impacts	No specific wards have been identified in relation to this Report
Workforce/Workplace	There will be a high level of impact on the workforce, who will require training and awareness of all related issues. Unison is involved at all stages of the proceedings.

Situation

- 9 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, placed a new positive race equality duty on all public authorities to:
 - Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination
 - Promote equality of opportunity
 - Promote good relations between people of different racial groups
 - Undertake monitoring of various functions by ethnic group
- 10 Local Authorities have also been required to publish a Race Equality Scheme and a Disability Equality Scheme, which set out how the Council will improve services to those specific groups of service-users.
- 11 The Equality Standard for local government which is a 'voluntary' Best Value Performance Indicator, was launched in 2001. The Standard recognises the importance of fair and equal treatment in local government services and employment. It is a framework to help local authorities introduce a

comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equality issues, and enables local authorities to mainstream: age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation into council policy and practice at all levels.

The Standard sets out a level-by-level 'checklist', for getting the system up and running. It is acknowledged that this takes time, resources and commitment to get these systems in place, and local authorities move at different paces. For this reason, it is important that progress through the levels is monitored and audited in a way that measures achievement at each level. Councils can measure their own progress, against the guidance, but formal assessment is required for Councils claiming achievement of Level 3, and of Level 5.

- 12 Successful implementation of the standard will depend on a partnership between the council and the community, and should involve

Councillors to:

- provide leadership and support,
- ensure resources are available
- engage with the local community
- provide a scrutiny role (in UDC , via the Performance Select Committee)

Managers, staff and trade unions, to

- work towards speedy implementation
- organise/participate in training
- challenge existing cultures and traditions
- engage with the community

Community/Voluntary Sector, to

- work with the equality planning process
- participate in consultation/scrutiny
- extend knowledge of the equality standard within the community.

- 13 In the Council's Corporate Plan, 2006-2009, achieving the Equalities Standard Level 2 was set as one of the Areas of Corporate Focus, as a cross-cutting topic. Since 30 January 2006 Uttlesford District Council has been working with our designated Dialog Consultant, Asha Pawar, under the Diversity in the District Scheme, a scheme for smaller Districts which require additional support in meeting their Duties.

- 14 Assisted by guidance from our Dialog consultant, a small working group, entitled the Equalities Standard Working Group (ESWG) has been working to lead the organisation towards achievement of the Standard, and has

produced various draft Policies, Schemes and documents, which will be the framework for the basis of the corporate project.

There is still much work to be done, and the ESWG accepts that these draft documents will be subject to constant review and update, as guidance and requirements and feedback from consultation emerge.

- 15 Although it is a requirement of the Equality Standard that all work, including documents and procedures must be consulted upon, externally and internally, the policy documents are currently with staff and Members for consultation, whereas externally, in the wider community, this is due to take place shortly.

The ESWG has been liaising with colleagues in the Communities Directorate, to organise consultation with hard-to-reach groups in the community, through Focus Panels and various other methods.

- 16 Colleagues throughout the organisation will need to be fully aware of, and committed to, the scope of the programme of equalities and the work this will entail for them; this will be achieved through a combination of awareness-raising, general equalities standard training and specific training on UDC practices and procedures.

- 17 It is proposed that Members are appraised of Equalities issues through briefing papers and presentations.

- 18 The purpose of this Report is to introduce the new Uttlesford District Council Equalities and Inclusion Policy, in the context of the wider equalities framework.

- 19 Please Note that it is intended to incorporate visual images in the Policy document in order to make it more appealing and readable. This version does not include these, owing to copyright issues.

- 20 The UDC Equalities and Inclusion Policy will incorporate standalone Schemes relating to the six strands of Equality issues. Currently the Race Equality and the Disability Equality Schemes are undergoing the full consultation exercise, but have been incorporated at this stage in this Policy.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
UDC not meeting our Equalities Standard if UDC does not adopt an Equalities and Inclusion Policy.	Low, as there is corporate commitment to achieving the standard.	High criticism from external auditors and reputational damage.	Ensure sufficient resources are available to ensure necessary work to be carried out.