

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 21 APRIL 2010

DRAFT EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY 2010-2013

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of Report

1. To present the draft Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy for comment by the Scrutiny Commission.

Background

2. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and Equality Act (Gender Equality Duty) 2006 all give local authorities 'general' and 'specific' duties to promote equality. All local authorities are required to produce equality schemes that show how they will meet these duties.
3. The County Council's Race Equality Scheme covered the period 2005 to 2007 and, to bring the Council's approach in line with that of national Government and other public authorities, it was decided to produce a single equality scheme – the current Equality and Diversity Strategy – that met the requirements of the legislation and the amended Equality Standard for Local Government.
4. More recently, the Council's Disability and Gender Equality Schemes have come to an end, and the requirement to produce these has been incorporated into the new draft strategy.
5. Since the development of the current strategy, the Government has been working on the development of the Equality Bill. The Bill is intended to make the current discrimination legislation more consistent across all equality groups. In addition to this, the new Equality Framework has been produced which requires authorities to work to a much broader definition of equality and to focus much more on achieving positive equality outcomes. Whilst our current strategy does extend to age, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, we needed to strengthen our approach to these.
6. There is also an increasing emphasis being placed on the Human Rights agenda and its link to equalities and diversity. Authorities are expected to be much more explicit about what they are doing to ensure that people's human rights are met. The most appropriate way of doing this is to include human rights issues with the equalities and diversity agenda.
7. The Council's current strategy runs until 2010 and is being updated with the new draft Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy.

Consultation and Involvement

8. The draft strategy, attached at Appendix A, has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including employees and organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors based in and/or providing services in Leicestershire.
9. Meetings have taken place with equality-focused organisations serving the County and discussions have taken place on the progress being made by the County Council, as well as what issues are still outstanding and what our key priorities for action should be.
10. Meetings with each of the Workers Groups took place and a questionnaire was available on the County Council's website and Intranet to encourage all staff to participate in developing the draft strategy.
11. A copy of the draft strategy has been available on the County Council's website and Intranet. People were asked to submit any comments on the draft produced before the end of March 2010. A summary of the responses received from the engagement exercise, along with any comments made on the draft Strategy up to the end of March 2010, is at Appendix B.
12. A detailed Equalities Action Plan has been developed to ensure the implementation of the objectives contained in the draft Strategy. A summary of the action plan is contained within the draft Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy.

Timetable for Decisions

13. Once all responses to the consultation have been analysed and any amendments made, a final version of the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy will be considered by Cabinet on 4 May 2010 and then the County Council at its meeting on 19 May.

Recommendation

14. It is recommended that the Scrutiny Commission considers the comments it wishes to make to the Cabinet on the consultation draft Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy.

Background Papers

None.

Officers to Contact

Nicole Rickard, Policy and Partnerships Team Leader

Tel: 0116 305 7017

Email: nicole.rickard@leics.gov.uk

Sally Edwards, Policy Manager – Equalities and Diversity

Tel: 0116 306 7446

Email: sally.edwards@leics.gov.uk

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy

Appendix B: Table of responses received to date

Appendix C: Draft Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Equal Opportunities Implications

15. The purpose of the draft Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy is to ensure that the County Council fulfils its general and specific duties under equalities legislation. It also meets the requirement of the revised Equality Framework for Local Government to address all 'strands'¹ of equality. The draft Strategy has been developed in light of the pending Equality Bill, currently being debated by Parliament.

16. A draft Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the draft Strategy has been completed as part of its development and is attached, for information, at Appendix C.

Environmental Impact

None.

¹ The six 'strands' identified in the Equality Framework are: age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.