

CABINET – 10 MAY 2010

FINAL EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

Purpose of Report

1. To present to the Cabinet the final version of the new Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy prior to seeking the approval of full Council on 19 May 2010.

Recommendation

2. That the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy be submitted for approval by the County Council on 19 May 2010.

Reason for Recommendation

3. To enable the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy to be considered by full Council at its meeting on 19 May 2010.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. If Cabinet approval is given, the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy will be submitted to full Council at its meeting on 19 May for approval.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. The County Council is required to produce equality schemes to show how it is meeting its statutory duties regarding equalities and diversity. Various equality schemes and plans have previously been approved by Cabinet. This Strategy consolidates and replaces all of these schemes.
6. The Strategy was developed in close collaboration with the Leicestershire Working Together Forum and other key stakeholders from the public, voluntary and community sectors between October 2009 and January 2010. A summary of the comments received on the Strategy is attached at Appendix 2.

7. The Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy was considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 21 April 2010. The Strategy was commended to the Cabinet.

Resources Implications

8. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report and no resource implications have been identified.

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

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PART B

Background

9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy.
12. Since the development of the County Council's first 'single' equality strategy in 2008, the Government has been working on the development of the Equality Bill. The Bill intends to make the current discrimination legislation more consistent across all equality groups. The Bill received Royal Assent on 7 April 2010.
13. 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 the Strategy produced in 2008 does extend to age, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, we needed to strengthen our approach to these.
14. 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.
15. This new Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy supersedes the previous Equality and Diversity Strategy produced in 2008.

Consultation and Involvement

16. The Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy, 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.
17. 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.

18. 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 Strategy.

19. A detailed Equalities Action Plan has been developed to ensure the implementation of the objectives contained in this Strategy.

Equal Opportunities Implications

20. The purpose of the Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy is to ensure that the County Council fulfils its general and specific duties under the equalities legislation, including the Equality Bill. It also meets the requirement of the revised Equality Framework for Local Government to address all 'strands'¹ of equality.

21. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Strategy has been completed as part of its development.

Background Papers

Reports of the Chief Executive to the Cabinet on 6 April and to the Scrutiny Commission on 21 April 2010.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy

Appendix B: Summary of responses received from stakeholders during the engagement, involvement and consultation processes

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