



SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 5 JUNE 2013

EQUALITY STRATEGY 2013-2016

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the draft Equality Strategy 2013-2016 for comment by the Scrutiny Commission. The Strategy provides a framework for the County Council's equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights activity, structured around the Council's ten priority equality objectives.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Equality Act received royal assent on 6 April 2010 but many of the provisions of the Act were brought into effect through the Public Sector Equality Duty in April 2011. The Act outlines three core duties which require public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
3. The County Council is required to produce an Equality Strategy to evidence how it is meeting its statutory duties regarding equality and diversity. Various equality strategies, schemes and plans have previously been approved by Cabinet. This revised Strategy builds upon each of these and also strengthens the County Council's approach to community cohesion and human rights. The current Strategy was approved by the full County Council in May 2010.

Background

4. The current Equality and Diversity Strategy was adopted by the County Council in 2010. It was agreed that the current Equality and Diversity Strategy would be reviewed every three years and refreshed to take account of any new (or significantly changed) equalities legislation and best practice.

5. Since the development of the current Strategy, the Equality Act 2010 and the associated Public Sector Equality Duty have been introduced and there is a need to evidence 'due regard' which means extending the Strategy to encompass and strengthen the County Council's approach to all of the 'protected characteristics' outlined in the Equality Act 2010 and strengthening our approach to Equality Impact Assessments. In addition, the Equality Framework requires authorities to work towards a much broader definition of equality and to provide a greater focus on achieving positive equality outcomes.
6. There is an ever increasing emphasis being placed on the Human Rights agenda and its links to equality and diversity. The expectation is that authorities make much more explicit what they are doing in relation to human rights and ensuring that people's human rights are being met. Some preliminary work has been done in relation to this agenda within the Authority (Adults and Communities, Legal Services) and there is clearly a need to properly analyse existing work and its proposed future direction. It is suggested that the most appropriate strategic way of doing this is to include human rights as a key component of the Equality Strategy and to strengthen links with the equality and diversity agenda in so doing.
7. The new draft Strategy takes into account the Equality Act 2010 and the County Council's legislative requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), developments in relation to the contents of the previous Strategy and in the Authority's equality-related work over the course of the last three years. As such, the County Council's ten Priority Equality Objectives very much form the focus of the new draft Strategy and there is a greater focus on and consideration of community cohesion and human rights. The ten Objectives are listed on page 16 of Appendix A.
8. The Strategy has four sections:
 - **Introduction:** Definitions, past outcomes, recent quantitative information about the people of Leicestershire and the Council's workforce.
 - **The County Council's approach to Equality, Diversity, Community Cohesion and Human Rights:** Why equality is important is discussed, and the County Council's legal obligations and current corporate and operational structures are outlined. There is a specific focus on the ten Priority Equality Objectives, and a contextualising of the Strategy within the broader, strategic priorities of the Authority.
 - **Embedding equality, diversity and human rights in everything we do:** This section focuses on equality and employment monitoring, the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process, learning and development, procurement and

commissioning and engagement.

- **Conclusion, Case Studies and Appendices:** Appendix 1 is a summary of the refreshed Equality, Diversity and Community Action Plan. Appendix 2 is a number of case studies from across the Authority.
9. The new Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion Action Plan 2013-2014 is to be used as supplementary information to the Strategy. This Action Plan has amalgamated what had previously been two separate operational pieces of work, the Single Equalities Action Plan (SEAP) and Community Cohesion Framework (CCF), in order to provide a greater focus upon community cohesion and the Priority Equality Objectives. The Action Plan is not currently subject to consultation.

Consultations

10. The ten week consultation period commenced on 7 March and ended on 16 May 2013. Appropriate engagement mechanisms were organised to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including employees and trades unions, the voluntary and community sector, and partner organisations to ensure the Strategy is relevant and meets stated needs.
11. A copy of the draft Strategy, a Plain English version, an Easy Read version and a questionnaire to use to make comments, were made available on the County Council's website and Intranet. Communication messages have been developed to encourage staff to participate in the consultation process.
12. Equality-focused organisations serving the county were sent copies of the draft Strategy and asked to contact the County Council if they were interested in attending a briefing to consider any issues in greater depth. Although briefing sessions were not arranged with individual organisations due to limited interest, telephone conversations have been held to talk through their comments on the draft Strategy.
13. We have received 10 completed questionnaires and 7 additional responses. To enable consideration of the Strategy in greater depth, briefing sessions were organised for Leicestershire Working Together (LWT), the Council's external scrutiny group, which consisted of members representing a range of community interest groups, and the County Council's three Workers Groups. A list of the responses is attached to this report at Appendix B.

Resource Implications

14. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

Timetable for Decision(s)

15. A final version of the Equality Strategy 2013-2016 will be considered by Cabinet on 9th July 2013. Any comments from the Scrutiny Commission on the draft Strategy will be reported to Cabinet at that meeting.
16. A detailed timetable for consultation/approval is set out in Appendix C to this report.

Conclusions

17. The draft Equality Strategy 2013-2016 provides a policy context for the County Council's activity around equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights. It sets out how the County Council will meet its legislative duty and the intention to develop equal and fair decision making processes, policies and services for all employees and residents.
18. It is important that the Authority's strong approach to equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights is maintained. Equality Impact Assessments are integral to this, adding value to the organisation and making the Authority resistant to legal challenge. Equality Impact Assessments are important in planning effective service delivery and in responding to community needs, and are particularly relevant in a period of financial austerity and significant service change.

Background Papers

Report to the Cabinet, 10 May 2010- Final Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy

Report to County Council, 19 May 2010- Final Equality, Diversity and Human Rights Strategy

Report to Cabinet, 6 March 2013- Draft Equality Strategy 2013-2016

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19. None.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Draft Leicestershire County Council Equality Strategy 2013-2016.

Appendix B: List of Consultation Responses

Appendix C: Strategy Timetable

Appendix D: Draft Equality Impact Assessment

Relevant Impact Assessments

20. A draft Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy has been completed as part of its development and is attached, for information, at Appendix D.

Equal Opportunities Implications

21. The purpose of the Equality Strategy 2013-2016 is to ensure that the County Council fulfils its general and specific duties under the various equalities legislation and meets the requirements to provide a consistent and coherent approach to achieving equality and diversity for each of the protected characteristics.

Partnership Working and Other Associated Issues

22. The County Council currently works with a number of partners across a variety of equality and diversity related activity. The Equality Strategy 2013-2016 will create opportunities to further develop partnership working around the equality, diversity, community cohesion and human rights agenda.

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