

ANNUAL EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY REPORT

AUDIT COMMITTEE

22 DECEMBER 2009

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the Council's approach to ensuring equality and diversity is embedded within:
 - Decision-making processes and structures
 - HR policies
 - Policy development frameworks
 - Performance management systems
 - Consultation processes.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. The draft Annual Equality and Diversity report (attached as Appendix 1) pulls together the key pieces of work being undertaken within the Council on equality and diversity within one, high-level summary document and sets out the outcomes achieved. This report enables the Council to state where it stands in relation to equality and diversity, reiterating its commitment to ensuring the Council is an organisation where:
 - no employee, job applicant or service user receives less favourable treatment because of their gender or transgender, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation or age
 - services meet the needs of our diverse communities
 - policies and procedures promote and monitor equality and diversity in Council employment and deal effectively with discrimination and harassment
 - any barriers that discourage access to employment or services are minimised or removed.

Report contents

3. The draft report contains details of the actions the Council has taken over the last year to improve access to service provision, promote equal opportunities and encourage good relationships. The Council's approach to equality and diversity through the use of a number of key tools and processes is outlined in detail within the report (pages 9 – 14). This includes:
 - Corporate Diversity Group
 - HR policies and procedures covering a wide range of aspects of the equality and diversity agenda
 - corporate provision of training on key equality and diversity issues made available to all staff
 - robust service planning, which includes the Diversity Action Plans

- Equality Impact Assessments
 - embedded equality and diversity within the Council's decision-making structures.
4. It also details how the Council monitors progress against the equality and diversity agenda. The information used to assess progress includes:
- Middlesbrough Neighbourhood Survey
 - Equality Framework for Local Government
 - Retained BVPIs
 - Workforce composition monitoring
 - Diversity Action Planning.
5. The report highlights the significant achievements that have been made in relation to equality and diversity in Middlesbrough, including:
- Achievement of Level 4 of the Equality Standard for Local Government
 - Strengthened decision-making processes to further embed a culture of equality and diversity considerations.
6. Once the remaining year-end data is available, the report will be submitted through the Council's decision-making processes.

Checks in place to ensure Equality and Diversity is considered

7. Many of the high level actions identified above would have limited impact without the systems that have been put in place to ensure that they occur. For example, every report that is considered by the Executive is required to be submitted to Corporate Management Team, at which point an assessment is made on the quality of the report and whether it meets corporate standards against a range of issues. One of these is the requirement to state whether the report has had an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) completed on it and whether the findings of the EIA have been fully outlined within the body of the report to ensure members are fully informed about the impact of the decision they are making.
8. All completed EIAs are logged on a diversity database held on Lotus Notes. The quality of the completed EIAs is scrutinised and challenged, first by the officer leading on equality and diversity within the Council and then by the Corporate Diversity Group. Completed EIAs are also attached to reports when they are submitted for decision. This ensures that members are fully aware of the impact of the decision they are taking and also means that the EIAs are publicly available via the Council's website and COMMIS system.
9. One of the key actions that has been taken, has been to ensure that equality and diversity issues are fully understood by officers developing recommendations. A corporate programme of training has been provided for a number of years covering a range of diversity issues including:
- Disability
 - Race awareness
 - Religion or belief
 - Mental Health Awareness

- Sexual Orientation
 - Equality Impact Assessment Workshop
 - HR Management for Management
 - Managers induction
 - Corporate Induction.
10. Training is also offered to Councillors on an ad hoc basis as issues arise and members have the opportunity to identify learning and development needs within their Personal Development Plans. However take up of this option has been low.
11. Plans are in place to develop a generic briefing to members on the latest legal requirements and best practice approaches being recommended on equality and diversity. This may include:
- details of the content of the Equality Bill currently being considered by Parliament
 - an outline of the role EIAs play in decision-making and the type of issues that should be considered by officers when planning decisions
 - the importance of considering explicitly considering the findings of EIAs within decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. It is recommended that:
- Council's draft Annual Equality and Diversity report is endorsed
 - Members consider the steps taken to date and further planned steps
 - Members support the proposals to provide Equality and Diversity update briefings to all members to ensure a continued awareness of Equality and Diversity issues and that they understand their responsibilities as decision-makers
 - Members consider the proposed content of the training and advise of any additional areas that should be included.

REASONS

To ensure good practice in relation to equality and diversity across the Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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