

## GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

27 NOVEMBER 2013

### REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS

#### EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Governance Committee on the progress made by the Council to embed Equality and Diversity within service and policy development and delivery, work undertaken to meet its public sector equality duty as required by equality legislation, but more importantly to deliver services which are accessible and meet the needs of Melton residents.

#### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **The progress made in this Annual Report be noted with particular reference to:**

- **The 'Achieving' level status expiring in March 2014;**
- **The creation of an internal Check & Challenge Group;**
- **The Equality and Diversity Action Plan attached at Appendix A;**
- **The three year Corporate Policy Test of Relevance and Equality Impact Assessment update commitments attached at Appendix B;**
- **The resourcing arrangements to support the Equality & Diversity Agenda.**

#### 3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Good progress has been made in norming the consideration of equalities and diversity into business as usual. This can be seen in volume increases and quality improvements of completed Equality Impact Assessments (EIA).
- 3.2 Internal challenge created through the Check & Challenge Group, alongside greater scrutiny of equality and diversity considerations through the committee process has helped drive up the quality of EIA submissions.
- 3.3 The Check & Challenge group is made up of individuals from across the organisation with a genuine interest in equalities & diversity or expertise in undertaking assessments. The terms of reference are attached at Appendix A.

- 3.4 The influence of a drive in the organisation to better understand our customers and coordinate internal and external data sources (The Melton Truth) has helped support a weakness around using data on which to base recommendations.
- 3.5 In line with the criteria set out for an 'Achieving' Council the Equalities and Diversity action plan has been updated for 2013/14 and is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.6 The action plan seeks to close off any gaps as set out against the 'Achieving' level criteria. Whereas the three year test of relevance outlines business as usual activities in reviewing key policies and their associated Equality and Diversity considerations.
- 3.7 The 'Achieving' level status lasts for a period of two years at which point Melton Borough Council would need to commission The Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID) group to undertake a new peer review in order to retain the mark. A decision would need to be made in advance of this whether the aim was to retain the 'Achieving' level or commit additional resources to aim for the 'Excellent' level.
- 3.8 LGID are currently reviewing their approach in respect to peer reviews and the Equality & Diversity Framework. As such a decision of the committee to guide Officers on future attainment is not requested at this stage. A future report will be brought to committee.
- 3.9 Members of the committee maybe interested to learn that the councils Check and Challenge group were recently highlighted as a good practice example to a unitary authority in Bedfordshire who were struggling to undertake and scrutinise their Equality Impact Assessments.
- 3.10 Officers have further secured the consultancy support of the Equality and Diversity resource previously employed by the 'Partnerships' lead authority, North West Leicestershire District Council. This support equates to 240 hours per annum for 2013/14 but the on-going budget supports an input of around half this.
- 3.11 The activities of the resource are aligned to the action plan at Appendix A, specialist advice on Equalities and Diversity where required and embedding the work of the Check & Challenge group into business as usual.
- 3.12 Proposed changes to the internal resourcing arrangement have resulted from the structural amendments within Central Services. The responsibilities for Equality and Diversity currently sitting with the Change Manager will move to the Revenues Business Partner post assuming approval of the structural changes by Policy Finance and Administration committee at its December meeting.

#### **4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 In order to ensure good corporate governance the council is required by legislation to ensure that in the exercise of its functions, it has paid due regard to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and fosters good relations.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Councils annual budget associated to resourcing for Equality and Diversity is £4,000 but has been increased for this initial twelve month period to £8,000 to enable equalities to be well embedded into business as usual.
- 5.2 As we move towards the expiry of the Authorities 'Achieving' status consideration would need to be given to the 2014/15 resources allocation for Equalities & Diversity. Considerable resources were allocated to support the assessment both from dedicated equalities staff within what was 'The Partnership' alongside Officers from across the organisation to pull together the evidence.
- 5.3 This level of commitment from Officers within the organisation would need to be resourced with consideration for other initiatives and additional funding to replicate the dedicated equalities resources.
- 5.4 There are direct costs associated with the peer review assessment itself. Ranging from £4,300 to £5,400 plus expenses.

## **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 There are no specific legal implications aspects to this report. However, failure to comply with the public sector equality duties could result in the council facing a legal challenge and its reputation being damaged.

## **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

- 7.1 There are no specific community safety aspects to this report.

## **8.0 EQUALITIES**

- 8.1 Good practise requires that regular equality and diversity progress reports are provided for scrutiny against agreed objectives for the council.

## **9.0 RISKS**

- 9.1 There are no direct risks associated from this report.

## **10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE**

- 10.1 There are no specific climate change implications relating to this report.

## **11.0 CONSULTATION**

- 11.1 There has been no direct consultation with officers of the council or the communities of the borough. The delivery of the equality and diversity agenda is driven by equality legislation.

## 12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 There will be a positive impact on all wards as a result of the delivery of the equality and diversity agenda.

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Contact Officer: Christian Coltart – Change Manager  
Date: 12 November 2013  
Appendices: Appendix A - Equalities & Diversity Action Plan  
Appendix B - Three year Test of Relevance  
Background Papers: N/A  
Reference: X: Cttee, Council & Siub Ctees/Governance/2013 14/271113