
Meeting: Executive
Date: 4 May 2010
Subject: Central Bedfordshire Council's Draft Single Equality and Diversity Scheme

Response of the Business Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 1.1 At its meeting of 26 October 2009, the Business Transformation Overview & Scrutiny Committee (BT OSC) considered the report of the Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation, which set out the Council's statutory equality duties, the action that must be taken to meet these duties and provided the Committee with the opportunity to consider and comment on an early draft of the Council's Equality and Diversity Scheme.
- 1.2 Members of the Committee were fully supportive of the draft Scheme, and were content to endorse its submission to the Executive, subject to the following comments and recommendations being incorporated within it before submission:-

Training & Development

- 1.3 Whilst the Committee wholeheartedly supported the Council's desire to tackle inequalities and were content with the policy direction outlined within the draft Scheme, there was a clear wish from Members to ensure this policy direction was followed through and delivered throughout the whole organisation and beyond. For this reason, Members were firm in their view that the draft Scheme should contain sufficient enough detail regarding the provision of smart, targeted, Training & Development for both Members and officers to assist in the practical achievement of this policy direction.
- 1.4 With regard to specific Training & Development initiatives, the Committee endorsed a number of suggestions from Members as follows, and requested that they too be captured within the draft Scheme and action plan:-
- a) A phased staff training approach, which concentrated limited resources on frontline staff in the first instance, and also ensured that any training delivered was appropriate to the target audience i.e. back office staff receiving light touch training with more comprehensive training for frontline staff;
 - b) The need to take into account, and coordinate, all Member Training & Development generally to ensure that limited time and resources were used to best effect. This may well mean the delivery of half/whole day training sessions in future, which addressed a number of topics such as Equalities & Diversity, Health & Safety, Risk Management, etc in bite-sized chunks at one session and it was suggested that the Member Development

Champions Group should consider this issue at the earliest opportunity;

- c) The need to produce and distribute a 1 page (or 2 page max) awareness raising document for all staff & Members, which would distil the draft Scheme into key action points;
- d) The need to incorporate Equality & Diversity awareness raising into the staff appraisal scheme.
- e) The need to ensure that Councillors were aware of how to feedback equality & diversity issues encountered, whilst undertaking their duties as ward representatives.

The Responsibility of the Individual

- 1.5 Whilst Members of the Committee again reiterated their strong desire to tackle inequalities, they were firm in their view that the draft Scheme should also highlight the responsibility of the individual to strive for self-reliance, a conviction which very much reinforced the concept of Total Place and its primary theme of “from dependence to self-reliance”.

Striking the Right Balance

- 1.6 Members discussed in some detail whether there was a need to establish a Council ambition within the draft Scheme regarding the achievement of Level 3 (Excellent and making a difference) of the new Equality Framework for Local Government introduced by the IDeA in April 2009.
- 1.7 Whilst Members agreed that this may well be an aspiration, there was no need to make this ambition explicit. Instead, the draft Scheme should make reference to the following overarching principles:-
 - a) The imperative to ensure the Council was legally compliant
 - b) The importance of striking the right balance between the costs and benefits arising from particular initiatives – a judgment call was required to ensure any actions outlined within the draft Scheme were proportionate i.e. actions did not deliver a disproportionate benefit to the few to the detriment of the many; and
 - c) Whilst achieving Level 3 of the new Equality Framework may well be an aspiration, the Council should not commit itself to such an aspiration without first knowing the implications (financial or otherwise) of such a commitment.

Content

- 1.8 There were a number of other suggestions from Members regarding improvements to the document itself, which should also apply to any other document produced by the Council in future. These were:-

- a) Ensuring the date of production of the document was clearly highlighted;
- b) Ensuring acronyms were fully explained at first use and also contained in a glossary towards the end of the document; and
- c) Ensuring that the source of any data/statistics quoted was included in the document.