
Meeting: Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 04 June 2012
Subject: Central Bedfordshire Draft Equality and Diversity Strategy 2013 - 16
Report of: Cllr Jones , Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources
Summary: The report proposes to update the Committee on progress in reviewing the Council's draft Equality and Diversity Strategy and to provide an early opportunity to comment on the content of the Strategy prior to the commencement of public consultation. A presentation will be delivered at the meeting to highlight how a focus on equality and diversity can support the achievement of council priorities.

Advising Officer: Deb Clarke Director of Improvement & Corporate Services
Contact Officer: Clare Harding Corporate Policy Adviser (Equality & Diversity)
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. Tackling inequality cuts across every activity of the Council and relates directly to the achievement of the Council's priorities:
 - Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.
 - Improved educational attainment.
 - Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable.
 - Better infrastructure – improved roads, broadband reach and transport.
 - Great universal services – bins, leisure and libraries.
 - Value for money – freezing council tax.

Financial:

2. The proposals contained within this report will be met within existing budgets. A focus on equality and diversity helps to ensure that the resources invested in public services actually benefit all those they are aimed at or who need them.

Legal:

3. The current equality legislation the council is required to comply with is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011.

Risk Management:

4. Failure to comply with equality legislation can expose the Council to the risk of costly litigation and also enforcement action by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. By adopting a variety of fair working practices the Council is more likely to attract and retain a broader pool of talented staff. Diversity of experience and ideas is more likely to lead to the identification of innovative solutions and effective service delivery.

Equalities/Human Rights:

6. The draft Strategy demonstrates the Council's awareness of how promoting equality and diversity can be key to understanding and meeting residents' needs and increasing employee satisfaction.

Public Health

7. Tackling inequality across the broad range of council functions helps support the attainment of public health objectives.

Community Safety:

8. Tackling inequality across the broad range of council functions helps support the attainment of community safety objectives.

Sustainability:

9. Issues such as economic development, sustainable communities, quality of life and community cohesion are all factors which can be influenced by an individual's experience of inequality and discrimination.

Procurement:

10. Public bodies must ensure that when public services or functions are contracted out that the needs of residents continue to be understood and fully met and that employment practices are fair.

RECOMMENDATION(S):**The Committee is asked to:-**

1. **Consider and comment on the draft Equality and Diversity Strategy and Action Plan attached at Appendix A**

Purpose of Report:

11. The report proposes to update the Committee on progress in reviewing the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy and to provide an early opportunity to comment on the content of the Strategy prior to the commencement of public consultation.

Background Information:

12. The Equality Act applies to public and private sector bodies and replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act.
13. Focusing on equality and diversity can help ensure that service and employment opportunities are available to all sections of society, in relation to the following protected characteristics, age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation
14. The Public Sector Equality Duty supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies proactively consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective; accessible to all; and which meet different people's needs.
15. The Council is keen to ensure that it continues to adopt a good practice and robust approach to equality issues across all its activities and believes that this can best be achieved through the continued implementation, review and inclusion of an Equality Strategy as part of the Council's Policy Framework.
16. The Draft Strategy sets out the progress that has been made to date across the Council and ongoing actions for the future can be found in Appendix 1 of the strategy.

Objectives and Actions

17. The Council has identified four corporate, overarching objectives and activities which are essential to ensuring that consideration of equality remains embedded across all Council activities.
 - Strong Leadership (Championing Equality in our Area and Identifying and Monitoring Equality Objectives)
 - Improved Outcomes for Vulnerable Groups
 - The Fair Recruitment and Management of a High Performing Workforce
 - Improved Engagement, Civic Participation and Cohesion

Conclusion and Next Steps

18. Central Bedfordshire Council has made good progress in advancing Equality and Diversity. The approval and publication of the draft Strategy 2013 -16 will help ensure that this progress is maintained and further developed.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Draft Equality and Diversity Strategy 2013 -16

Background papers and their location: None