

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 22 NOVEMBER 2011

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

EQUALITIES - DELIVERING BETTER SERVICES FOR OUR CUSTOMERS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

The purpose of this report is to update members on progress made since the last annual report was presented to Community Scrutiny on 26 October 2010. The report also alerts members of the evolving equalities legislation particularly, Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010, The Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force in April 2011.

RECOMMENDATION FOR : Community Scrutiny Committee

(A)	To note summary of key findings from the Equalities Impact Assessment Work Programme for 2008-2011 so that information gathered is used to prioritise future equality actions;
(B)	To endorse the refresh of the existing Corporate Equality Policy, Scheme and Action Plan and revisit in 2012/2013; and
(C)	To note and consider the changes in obligation to the Council arising from the new Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force in April 2011.

1.0 Background

1.1 In 2008 the Council adopted a generic approach to equalities. This involved agreeing a Comprehensive Corporate Equality Policy, Scheme and Action Plan. This has proved to be a good choice of direction. Officers have considered the Equality Policy and are content any changes required were minor and that it continues to serve its purpose as a touchstone for the Council.

- 1.2 A new Public Sector Equality Duty, Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, came into force in 1 April 2011. The Public Sector Equality Duty replaces the three previous duties on race, disability and gender and extends it to cover age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment, all of which are now known as protected characteristics.
- 1.3 The change in legislative requirements complements the approach already taken by the Council, moving away from publishing long, formulaic documents towards focussing on the main issues of delivering equal access to services. Equalities Impact Assessments continue to be a useful and important analytical tool and demonstrate the Council's commitment to having due regard and that the relevant equality issues have been considered.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 The Council can evidence progress made through 43 completed Equalities Impact Assessments across all services and functions. Examples of Modifications to services can be summarised as follows:

Environmental Services

Improved standards of neighbourhood management

- the introduction of the Community Toilet Scheme in Ware and Bishop's Stortford has increased the number and distribution of public toilets. This enables the service to be more accessible for people with mobility problems and people with disabilities.
- the live reporting system "ECHO" used for the Waste and Recycling contract has enabled closer monitoring of the Waste Collection service. This ensures that 'Exempt' customers who are unable to present their bin at the boundary, due to infirmity or disability, receive a more reliable service.
- the work carried out through the Parks Improvement programme has focused on improving access e.g., Pishiobury Park, Southern Country Park and The Ridgeway. The easy access route down into the Dell has vastly improved access to all residents including those with mobility problems. Specific play improvements such as at Bentley Road and King George have also improved access to play in general.

Housing Register, Allocations and Homelessness

Multi-Agency approach

- priority is given to those who need to move from accommodation on medical or welfare grounds
- priority given to households who are pregnant or have children
- 16 to 17 year olds are now defined as having priority housing needs

Revenues and Benefits

Safeguarding Residents

- a home visiting service is provided to assist elderly, disabled and vulnerable clients. This is supported by expanded home working and mobile working
- for some claimants, English may not be their first language, they can access help via the language line facility in the following areas:
 - Where to get help and advice in the UK
 - Information about rights to live and work in the
 - Welfare benefits
 - Housing
 - Public services
 - Driving in the UK
- provide assistance to those having difficulty reading and writing

Community and Cultural Services

Council as a Community Leader

- incorporation of a new set of questions in Grants application form indicate funding preferences and priorities focus on small local groups, first time applicants and vulnerable people
- the Sustainable Community Strategy addresses inequality and quality of life by encouraging residents to influence policy by joining Citizens Panel, Youth Council, VCS Forums, Rural Conferences, etc

People and Organisational Services

Reasonable Adjustments

- the development and implementation of a new Adaptive/Assistive Technology Assessment for Officers and Members detailing impairment type, severity and the range of appropriate Adaptive/Assistive Technology solutions that are available.
- 2.2 The Equalities Officers Group continues in its function as an internal working group. The group ensures that the Council is fulfilling its duty to measure the impact of its policies and services on its employees and on the wide range of residents it serves. The Equalities Officers Group has been used as a consultative forum in helping to develop and shape the Equalities Impact Assessment Work Programme for 2012-2015.
- 2.3 The Equalities Champions are advocates within their respective services. They encourage colleagues to complete the equalities monitoring questions to reinforce the Corporate Equality messages.
- 2.4 The Council is making an impact beyond its remit on the wider community; an example of this is the sharing of the newly developed Adaptive/Assistive Technology Assessment with Hertfordshire County Council to be rolled out through HAFLS (Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Services).
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Essential Reference Paper "B"

Contact Member: Councillor Linda Haysey
Executive Member for
Community Development, Leisure and Culture

Contact Officer: George A Robertson
Director of Customer and Community Services
Ext 1410

Report Authors:

Marianne McWhinnie
Community Projects Officer (Equalities)
Ext 1595

Mekhola Ray
Community Projects Team Leader
Ext 1613

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i></p>	<p>Promoting prosperity and well-being; providing access and opportunities <i>Enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.</i></p> <p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Shaping now, shaping the future <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>The Council consults with marginalised and vulnerable groups through its work on community engagement and customer care. Internal Consultation has also taken place with Equalities Officers Group members and the Director of Customer and Community Services. This recognises that fact that equality considerations must be an integral part of all relevant work across the Council.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>The Equality Act 2010 is the law which bans unfair treatment and helps achieve equal opportunities in the workplace and in wider society. The Public Sector Equality Duty, Section 149 of the Act, places a legal requirement on public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the course of developing policies and delivering services.</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>Service user involvement is a key aspect and will incur consultation costs for the need to provide aids such as interpreters, advocates for people with learning difficulties or mental health issues as appropriate. As there is no central budget for this, it is expected that all services undertaking consultation should take these issues into consideration and make financial arrangements as appropriate.</p>

Human Resource:	Staff dealing direct with customers will need annual refresher training on the implications of the Equality Act 2010. This is already included in and can be monitored through PDR's.
Risk Management:	The Equality and Human Rights Commission will pursue formal legal action where public authorities do not take sufficient and reasonable steps to comply with the duty.