

**Select Committee on Economic Regeneration
– 8th June 2005**

Report of the Director of Finance

**Equality and Diversity Annual Report of the Directorate of
Finance, ICT and Procurement for 2004/05**

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement's Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2004/05.

2. Background

- 2.1 The production of an annual equality and diversity action plan and annual report by each directorate is a requirement of the Council's equality and diversity policy. This year the action plan and annual report has been presented in two parts. The select committee considered the directorate's action plan which sets out equality and diversity targets for 2005/06 at its meeting held on 1st March 2005. Attached is the annual report which details progress on the targets agreed by the select committee in the directorate's action plan for 2004/05.
- 2.2 This Committee has agreed to take the lead select committee role on equality and diversity issues, although responsibility for scrutinising individual directorate's action plans and annual reports has been divided between the six select committees.

3. Proposal

- 3.1 That Members consider and comment on the Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement's Equality and Diversity Annual Report for 2004/05.

4. Finance

- 4.1 Any costs associated with the annual report will be met from within existing budgets.

5. Law

- 5.1 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 replaces Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 with a new general duty on public authorities to work towards the elimination of unlawful discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.

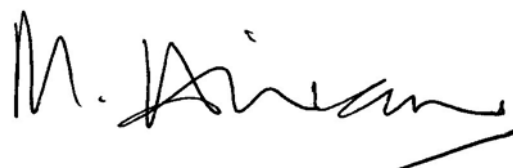
- 5.2 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 makes it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people in connection with employment, the provision of goods, facilities and services, and the disposal or management of premises.
- 5.3 The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 renders unlawful certain kinds of sex discrimination. In particular, Section 25 makes it unlawful for the Council in providing facilities or services (such as those arising pursuant to the statutory functions of the Council) to discriminate against any person seeking to obtain or use those facilities or services on the grounds of gender.
- 5.4 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council is empowered to do anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to the discharge of its functions.

6.0 Equal Opportunities

- 6.1 The annual report contains details of initiatives undertaken in implementing the Council's equality and diversity policy.

7.0 Recommendation

- 7.1 That Members consider and comment on the attached annual report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Ainsworth', with a horizontal line drawn underneath the signature.

Director of Finance

Contact officer: Menna Flavell, ext 4807

Background papers: Guidance for the preparation of directorates' annual equality and diversity action plans and annual reports

Directorate of Finance, ICT and Procurement

Equality and Diversity Annual Report 2004/05

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Annual Report sets out the Finance Directorate's activities throughout 2004/05 in supporting the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy, in relation to both employment and service delivery. The report summarises progress in achieving corporate and directorate objectives. It also provides key facts and background information about the directorate.
- 1.2 In previous years, the Annual Report was combined with the Equality and Diversity Action Plan for the following year. The two elements are now presented separately:
- a) to ensure that targets and actions are in place at the start of the new financial year
 - b) to enable results to be reported for the whole of the previous financial year.

The Action Plan (2005/06) was considered by the Select Committee on Economic Regeneration on 1 March 2005 and subsequently approved by the Cabinet Member for Finance through the Decision Sheet process.

2.0 Background Information and Key Facts about the Finance Directorate

- 2.1 Underpinning the Council's Vision, as outlined in the Council Plan, the Finance Directorate's main aims are to secure best value for the Council by:
- Serving its customers
 - Promoting good stewardship of public funds
 - Supporting the Council's objectives as detailed in the Council Plan
 - Providing good staff management
 - Promoting equality and diversity, ensuring equal opportunity for all
- 2.2 The Directorate publishes an annual Strategic Plan, to inform staff, internal customers and Council members of its work. The plan, which is available on the Council's Intranet, sets out the Directorate's objectives, priorities and targets for the year, including those for equality and diversity issues. The main plan provides comprehensive

links into other key documents including divisional business plans. Performance in achieving plan targets is measured and managed through regular meetings between senior management and divisional (service) heads, and is formally reviewed by the directorate's management team on a quarterly basis.

- 2.3 Within the directorate, high priority is given to ensuring all services comply with equality and diversity policies and current legislation. A member of the directorate management team is lead officer for equality and diversity, and a principal officer has specific responsibility to link directorate activities to the corporate agenda, enabling policies to be translated into action at directorate and divisional level. This includes liaising with senior management and divisional heads, providing advice and direction, monitoring progress and preparing regular progress reports.

3.0 Employment

- 3.1 In March 2005, the Finance Directorate employed 594 staff, working in 6 service divisions (Audit, Benefit, Financial, ICT, Purchasing and Revenue Services). The most significant change to the workforce compared with previous years has been the appointment of additional staff to deal with assessment of housing and council tax benefits (in line with government recommendations).

- 3.2 Due to the ongoing introduction of a new Human Resource Management system, it has not been possible to produce an up to date detailed workforce analysis at this time. The analysis (workforce and recruitment) will therefore be presented as part of the corporate Annual Review of Equality and Diversity, to be produced later in 2005/06.

- 3.3 A brief workforce analysis carried out in February 2005 indicated that 6.8% of the workforce was from ethnic minority groups compared with 5.8% in 2003/04.

3.4 Leavers

The directorate monitors its leavers with regard to destination (including other directorates of the Council), reason for leaving etc. and the results are reported quarterly to the management team. Any comments made by leavers are taken on board and addressed. Staff are provided an "exit interview" with an independent officer if required.

3.5 Training and Development

The Finance directorate is a recognised Investor in People (IIP) organisation. The IIP criteria reflect equality and diversity through encouraging strategies for developing and managing a diverse workforce and evaluating success. All staff participate in a Performance Review and Development (PRD) discussion with their line manager, to discuss their work performance and any training needs.

An analysis of formal training received is shown in Table 3 below. This is in addition to any on-the-job training undertaken on a day to day basis.

Table 3 – Analysis of training received by ethnic origin

Workforce category	Short courses		Professional / vocational	
	No	% of workforce category	No.	% of workforce category
Ethnic Minority	15	39.5	2	5.3
White	323	58.1	43	7.7

4.0 Service Delivery

4.1 The Directorate delivers a wide range of services, both to the general public and other directorates. Through its service aims and performance management arrangements, the directorate ensures its customers receive a high quality, cost effective service, which is consistently exemplified in high customer satisfaction and positive independent review results.

4.2 Front line services include:

4.2.1 Benefit Services

Provides an up to date, high quality, caring benefit service at a cost the public and the Council can afford, in a rapidly changing environment. The service administers a live caseload of 29,000 housing benefit / council tax benefit claims, paying out over £70m in benefits each year. As well as dealing with correspondence and personal visitors, the service carries out approx. 10,000 home visits each year, meeting specific client needs. The service includes the Benefits Shop, located in the Churchill Precinct, which advises residents and helps them claim over £1m in additional welfare benefits each year, as well as running campaigns to encourage people to claim Attendance Allowance and Income Support, to which they are entitled.

Benefit Services renewed its Charter Mark in 2004. The service has also scored top marks in the government's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) review in the last three years.

4.2.2 Revenue Services

Collects the maximum amount of local taxes in a cost effective and caring manner. The service administers the billing, collection and recovery of 130,000 council tax and 10,000 business rates accounts. Customers are offered a range of ways to contact the service and make payment, in line with the electronic government agenda. Discounts and reliefs are granted where appropriate – these total over 75,000 in number, amounting to £10m each year.

Revenue Services achieves one of the best council tax collection rates among metropolitan councils, at a low cost. It offers customers a wide range of payment facilities, including electronic or telephone as well as the regular counter in Priory Street, Dudley. This increases customer choice while reducing costs.

4.3 Services that support other Directorates include:

4.3.1 Audit Services

Investigates and reviews internal controls and risk, ensuring the Council's resources are used in the best interest. Under the Council's Race Equality Scheme, a service review was carried out during 2004/05 (see 5.2 below).

4.3.2 Financial Services

In addition to the elements mentioned in 4.2 above, provides financial information, training, support and advice to managers and members of the Council. This includes managing the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets and borrowings. It also administers the Council's payroll and pensions function. In 2004, Financial Services was awarded the Midlands Excellence award for Midlands Equal Opportunities Employer. Under the Council's Race Equality Scheme, reviews of the Exchequer and Risk Management parts of the service were carried out during 2004/05 (see 5.2 below).

- Exchequer - provides a service for the payment of creditor invoices for the Council and ensures that a good level of sundry debt collection is achieved. The service deals directly with the public and businesses, who may need to contact the Council regarding their payment.
- Risk Management - gives advice and guidance to managers to ensure the Council's assets are protected in the most effective and efficient way; also deals with insurance claims against the Council.

4.3.3 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Services

Helps the Council deliver best value by exploiting ICT. The service supports the Council's data communication network and provides advice, guidance and training on ICT issues, particularly in the Council's adherence to the electronic government agenda. ICT Services supports the Council's bid for Implementing Electronic Government as well as the Customer Access to Services (CATS) initiative.

4.3.4 Purchasing Services

Develops arrangements for purchasing goods and services and supports major projects and contracts within the Council. Under the Council's Race Equality Scheme, a service review was carried out during 2004/05 (see 5.2 below).

4.4 Consultation

Customer consultation takes place in all service areas. All divisions have key targets relating to customer satisfaction, whether for internal or external customers. In the case of external customers, both Benefit and Revenue Services have conducted surveys.

- 4.5 To fulfil Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 80, Benefit Services conducted a customer satisfaction survey in 2003/04, where the overall satisfaction with the service was 79%. The survey, which is run every 3 years, collects responses by equality monitoring categories and the data is submitted to the government. To date, the equality data has not been released. Surveys are also conducted of 100 customers a month, including 5% from ethnic minorities and 5% with a disability, asking about their satisfaction with the service, and addressing any concerns. The service also runs highly successful Customer and Landlord Focus Groups, whose members receive information about the service and can make suggestions as to how it can be improved.

- 4.6 Revenue Services carries out a general and banking hall customer satisfaction survey.

5.0 Race Equality Scheme

- 5.1 During 2004/05, in accordance with the Council timetable and plan, the Directorate undertook 4 race equality reviews – in respect of the Audit, Purchasing, Risk Management and Exchequer functions. For all these services, their impact on the community is considered low in comparison with other Council Services, as they mainly provide services to other directorates. The reviews have therefore been relatively “light touch”. The outcomes of the reviews are currently being considered by the services, however the early indications of improvements is given below. A summary of the outcome of the reviews is given below:

- Continue to provide equality awareness training to staff, particularly where service monitoring has indicated that this may be beneficial
- The work currently being undertaken in the Directorate to prepare for Charter Mark accreditation will have an impact on all the above services with regard to their overall development and improvement over time.

- 5.2 The findings of the reviews are currently being considered in more detail by the respective divisional management teams, as part of the overall drive to implement improvements.

6.0 Achievement of objectives

- 6.1 A schedule detailing the planned outcomes / performance indicators / targets for 2004/05 and progress in achieving these is included in Appendix 1 reflecting ongoing action in these areas.

Appendix 1 - Achievement of targets set for 2004/05

(1) Progress in achieving the targets in the 2003/04 Equality and Diversity Action Plan – Corporate Targets

No.	Objective	Planned Outcomes / Performance Indicators	Progress
CP1	Race Equality scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete year 2 reviews of Revenue and ICT Services Commence and progress year 3 reviews for Audit, Purchasing, Risk Management and Sundry Debt Commence review of scheme and coordinate with work on Equality Standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviews undertaken and reports and recommendations for action considered by management teams Desk top reviews undertaken (Risk Mgt to be completed by 31 May deadline) and reports produced for consideration / action planning by services Corporate work commenced – we are supporting as required
CP2	Equality Standard for Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss targets following feedback from Corporate Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate work on this area is progressing. Directorates currently gathering evidence for 2004/05 audit.
CP3	Disability Discrimination Bill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate likely implications for the directorate as part of corporate work Commence preparations for the introduction of the Act in the next 18 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate response to DWP consultation exercise on the functions of public bodies, the duty to promote equality and the scope of Disability Equality Schemes. Review of Banking Hall will result in access improvement funded from disability access budget, as will stairwell in 4 Ednam Rd (Health and Safety initiative)
CP4	Workforce targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposed targets for proportions of the workforce from BME and disabled groups in directorates to be established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal targets not yet set, however initial results for the March 2005 workforce monitoring exercise show the directorate has 6.8% of staff from ethnic minority groups compared with the 2001 Census figure of 6.3%
CP5	BVPI 2b – Duty to promote race equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement of a 50% score against the BVPI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate work on this area is progressing (initial assessment done suggests the target will be achieved) – we will support as required

(2) Progress in achieving the targets in the 2004/05 Equality and Diversity Action Plan – Finance Directorate targets

No.	Objective	Planned Outcomes / Performance Indicators	Progress
F1	Fairer society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximise take-up of benefits and reliefs by priority groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits shop activity for general benefit take-up (£1.014m achieved) Benefits Shop Attendance Allowance and Income Support take-up campaigns (AA – 556 successful new applications averaging £66 per week per claimant; IS – approx. 700 successful new applications averaging £20 per week per claimant) Council Tax reliefs / discounts of £11.7 granted Reduction of £2.2m awarded to the non domestic rate payers of charitable and similar organisations
F2	Access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality and diversity issues embraced as part of the impact of CATS Charter Mark progressed – reflecting the access requirements of all customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits customer focus group kept informed and consulted; any customer access issues raised are passed direct to CATS and via the Equality and Diversity Advisory Group Participated in corporate customer communication working group to recommend an approach for interpretation, translation and customer communication in general Benefits achieved; other divisional work progressing according to timetable Customer Services Intranet site established / maintained – includes access to services issues e.g. how to obtain interpretation, translation, dealing with disabled customers etc.
F3	Consult with and market our services to customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External customer consultation developed Marketing of services evaluated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benefits Customer Focus Group achievements, including participation from Revenues Directorate Customer Service Policy and Procedure produced (includes providing advice and information about service). Divisions are reviewing their own policies against this. Directorate Consultation Strategy produced

No.	Objective	Planned Outcomes / Performance Indicators	Progress
F4	Review key processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research good practice examples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Directorate participation in corporate Race Equality workshops and training events will enable sharing of good practice
F5	Fair and equal treatment of staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staffing group work Improvement Plan - PRD moderation (consistency, fairness, staff satisfaction with the process etc.) Actions from employee survey results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work of group reported back to DMT, although no specific equality and diversity issues had been raised. Employee satisfaction and PRD-specific surveys undertaken