

Meeting of the Cabinet – 17th March 2010

Report of the Director of Corporate Resources

Review of the Gender Equality Scheme

Purpose of Report

1. To consider a revised gender equality scheme for the Council.

Background

2. Public authorities currently have a statutory duty to publish disability, gender and race equality schemes and to revise their disability and gender schemes every three years. At its December 2009 meeting the Cabinet approved a revised disability equality scheme. A revised, three-year gender equality scheme is required to be published by the end of April 2010.
3. The report to December Cabinet noted that the Equality Bill currently before Parliament contains proposals for removing the requirement for producing equality schemes but, should they become law, the earliest the proposals were likely to come into force would be April 2011. The production of a gender equality scheme in the meantime therefore remains a legal requirement.
4. The Council published its first gender equality scheme as part of its wider combined equality scheme with the statutory race and disability equality schemes in April 2007. A non-statutory supplement to this scheme covering age, religion or belief, sexual orientation and transgender was added in June 2009 following approval by the Cabinet. Assuming the Equality Bill is enacted it is proposed to review the remainder of the combined scheme in the light of the new requirements and statutory guidance which will follow from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) during 2010/11.
5. Progress with implementing the gender equality scheme has been reported in the annual reviews of equality and diversity, the latest review having been approved by the Cabinet at its October 2009 meeting. Achievements arising from issues highlighted in the first scheme include:

- High profile campaigns raising awareness of domestic abuse and increasing levels of reporting
 - Improvements to engagement e.g. through women's issues workshops at the annual BME community engagement events; Muslim women's network events; the establishment of a borough LGBT forum
 - A wide range of support and advice for carers
 - Extension of flexible working opportunities including piloting of home working
 - New approaches to training with increasing availability of e-learning options which are more accessible to employees who work part-time or non-standard hours
 - Improvements to the safety and security of car parks
6. The EHRC recently issued guidance to public authorities on what to include in revised gender equality schemes. It highlighted four particular areas where action was expected:
- Income and pay gaps
 - The gender power gap in public sector leadership positions and politics
 - The causes and consequences of violence against women and girls
 - Discrimination and harassment against transsexual and transgender people.
7. The council's scheme will respond to these issues and also highlight action on other areas including:
- Wider domestic abuse issues
 - Training and employment e.g. flexible working
 - Achievements of boys and girls in schools
 - Childcare provision
 - Support to carers
 - Engagement on gender issues
 - Community learning provision e.g. ESOL (English for speakers of other languages)

Finance

8. The costs associated with the arrangements set out in the scheme will be met from existing budgets.

Law

9. The Equality Act 2006 requires a public authority in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment, and to promote equality of opportunity between men and women.

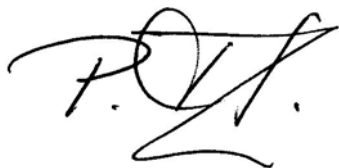
10. The Sex Discrimination Act (Public Authorities) (Statutory Duties) Order 2006 requires public authorities to produce a Disability Equality Scheme every three years.

Equality Impact

11. The scheme sets out the Council's approach to promoting gender equality. It provides details of what information gathering and impact assessments reveal about the impact of the council's policies and services on men and women, and identifies a range of actions relating to these. The annual reviews of equality and diversity report presented to the Cabinet report on progress with implementing these actions.

Recommendation

12. It is recommended that Members:
- Identify any other issues they wish to see tackled in the revised gender equality scheme
 - Authorise the Director of Corporate Resources, in consultation with Councillor Adrian Turner, to approve the final version of the scheme.



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List of Background Papers: A practical guide to revising gender equality schemes (Equality and Human Rights Commission)