

APPENDIX D

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 18 JANUARY 2010

Title:

REVIEW OF EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY MATTERS

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Richard Gates]

[Wards Affected: All]

Summary and purpose:

To review the work of the Council in the last year on equality and diversity matters, to explore the challenge role of Members on these issues and to seek Members' endorsement of Corporate Equality and Diversity aims.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

This report relates directly to the Corporate priority of improving peoples' lives - improving the quality of life for all, particularly the more vulnerable within our society.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

These are dealt with in the report.

Resource/Value for Money implications:

There are no direct financial implications.

Legal Implications:

There are no direct legal implications.

Introduction

1. In March 2009 the Council achieved level 2 under the Equality Standard for Local Government and adopted its single Equality Scheme 2009-2011. A new Equality Framework for Local Government was introduced on April 1st and the Council is currently working to gain 'achieving' status under the Framework in March 2010. A Peer Challenge Review is taking place at the beginning of March by an external team of officers and a member from other local authorities. This report outlines the requirements of the new Framework, updates the Committee on progress and examines the scrutiny role of members on equality and diversity issues.

Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG)

2. The EFLG was introduced on 1st April 2009 and replaced the Equality Standard which had been used since 2001. The new Framework is based on three levels; 'developing', 'achieving' and 'excellent' rather than the 5 levels in the old standard. The Framework contains new features such as;

- a wider definition of equality, based on equal life chances
- a new section on 'Knowing your communities and equality mapping'
- a focus on equality outcomes for all sections of the community
- a central role for self-assessment and peer challenge.

3. The definition of equality states

"An equal society protects and promotes equal, real freedom and opportunity to live in the way people value and would choose, so that everyone can flourish.

An equal society recognises people's different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and be."

4. This definition is more aspirational than formal legal definitions and is about what we can do to create a fairer society. It states that:

- equality is an issue for us all
- we don't all start from the same place
- to create a fairer society we need to recognise different needs

5. Rather than just concentrating on the six strands recognised by law i.e. race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age, the new Framework goes further. Local authorities must explore not only the barriers in their communities to those people potentially disadvantaged within these recognised target groups but it must also explore ways of creating equal life chances for all those in the community.

6. The Framework describes how life chances can be measured against ten key 'domains' or outcomes: longevity; physical security; education; health; standard of living; productive and valued activities; individual, family and social life; participation, influence and voice; identity, expression and self respect ; and legal security.

7. The definition of equality in the Framework is very close to the way inequality and vulnerability is defined by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates for the purposes of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). The Audit Commission, for example, states that

"Effective local public services target effort where improvement is most needed to tackle inequalities within and between communities....."

We will consider how well local partners know and understand the nature and extent of inequality and disadvantage within their communities and how effectively they are working to reduce or eliminate discrimination."

8. The Audit Commission have given clear advice that under the CAA their approach will be to test outcomes rather than look at process. It will not be sufficient in future to cite consultation with various stakeholders; the consultation must have produced an outcome.

Performance Areas Within the Framework

9. There are five performance areas:
 - Knowing your communities and equality mapping
 - Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
 - Community engagement and satisfaction
 - Responsive services and customer care
 - A modern and diverse workforce

Knowing Our Community and Equality Mapping

10. The aim of knowing our communities and equality mapping is to gain an understanding of these communities within the context of other major issues such as health, education, community safety, access to work and identifying where the equality gaps are for different groups. Measuring the gaps should be the basis for identifying local priorities and key outcomes. The framework is clear that “it will be impossible to develop an outcome focused approach without this core evidence.”
11. The starting point for the collection of data has been census information and the large amount of information that the County has prepared for the Strategic Partnership. In addition to this information we also collect information about our customers. For example, assisted collection requests for refuse collection can give us a good idea about how many disabled people there are in the Borough. The Planning Policy section have recently prepared a major piece of work on the settlements in Waverley listing facilities, character and other features. The intention is to build on this and create a ward map that will identify equality gaps. Other organisations can also assist us in this such as Citizens Advice Waverley who collect a great deal of information about their customers and the PCT with their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
12. By building up this picture we can also provide an evidential base for other work on community cohesion, customer care and CAA. The new CAA will specifically test outcomes of 'how well inequality is being addressed'. We will need to demonstrate that we know our communities, our local community profiles and main 'equality gaps'.
13. It is vital to ensure that strategy formulation and service planning is done on the basis of an accurate picture of our communities and it includes the voices of the most vulnerable and hard to reach groups. Effective consultation strategies are essential and we have therefore recently reviewed Waverley's Consultation Strategy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and we will shortly be reviewing our communication strategy.

14. A great deal of information has been collected over the years on some of Waverley's more deprived areas and this information has been used to target services and to work with partners to increase life chances in these areas. Examples of this work have been the outreach work at Sandy Hill, The Chantry and Ockford Ridge. This work has made tangible improvements in these areas. The Chantry has now adopted a neighbourhood agreement where residents and the council agree to abide by certain rules in order to improve life on the estate. Working in partnership with a number of agencies has made a difference. At the Chantry for example, Jubilee Church has expressed a commitment to take on the running of the community centre and will provide much needed crèche and youth activities. A survey has recently been carried out at Ockford Ridge as the first stage of assessing the needs of the residents.

Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

15. Strategic leadership, both political and managerial, is key to improving equality outcomes. Local councillors in particular have an important role to play in ensuring equality issues are integral to the Council's performance and strategic aims. Ward councillors have a great deal of knowledge of the needs of different sections of their community and changes in the population of their local area. Knowledge of the needs of different communities and key equality gaps should inform strategic priorities. A series of meetings is being held with ward members to hear at first hand issues arising from their communities. This information will contribute to the ward equality mapping mentioned earlier.
16. The Framework also emphasises working in partnership with local primary care trusts, the police, fire and rescue services and the voluntary and community sector. The Waverley Strategic Partnership has been working on a number of issues to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of our communities through the Communities Health and Social Inclusion Group. There has been a great deal of partnership work for example on reducing teenage pregnancies in the Ockford Ridge and Central Godalming wards. Other objectives include reduction in smoking, reduction in alcohol related harm and a reduction in 16-18 year olds not in education, employment or training.
17. The Framework also requires evidence of organisational commitment in terms of resource allocation, compliance with public duties, democratic engagement, scrutiny, service planning and procurement.
18. The Corporate Plan has specific corporate objectives under the key priority of 'improving the quality of life for all, particularly the more vulnerable in our society.' For example, one objective is to increase the year-on-year uptake of Housing and Council Tax Benefits by 2% in target groups (pensioners and low- income families) from April 2008. Progress on all the equality focused objectives are monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

19. Members will be aware of the excellent work carried out by the staff involved in the 'Don't Lose Your Home' initiative, launched by the Council during 2009. As part of the Social Inclusion Strategy the Council has also recently adopted a Financial Inclusion Approach.

Community Engagement and Satisfaction

20. Community engagement means moving beyond simple consultation exercises, important as they can be, to more innovative ways of involving communities and neighbourhoods. The recent participatory budgeting exercise is a good example of this.
21. Communities of place are not always the same as communities of interest and it is important to have the means to involve these communities of interest in decision making as well as service and workforce planning. Over the last few years a number of 'critical partner groups' have been set up to engage and explore issues affecting certain target groups and to challenge the Council's service delivery. Waverley's Top Youth Council gives a voice to young people and Waverley's Youth Development Officer has been working closely with them to achieve their priority outcomes. Recently they have raised issues about safety, transport, and access to services such as gym facilities. Their representation has resulted in greater access by young people to gym facilities at Farnham Leisure Centre. They are also playing a major role in devising a Youth Strategy for the Council. A constant theme across the critical partner groups is about rural isolation and lack of transport. The recent consultation on budgeting also reflected this view in its support of the Hoppa bus service. The Network for Older People brings together users of elderly services, voluntary organisations, Social Services, Waverley Housing Services, the PCT and a number of other organisations focusing on the needs of the elderly.
22. Waverley's Disability Forum was set up two years ago and has been very successful in improving access to Council buildings and services. Members of the Forum have carried out audits of all of Waverley's locality and main offices as well as undertaking mystery shopping exercises for example at election time. The main issues affecting the Forum are transport and accessibility. The Forum have also scrutinised various Equality Impact Assessments such as refuse collection and disabled adaptations. Most recently a group of Forum members and Council Officers have been working together to set up a disability access award scheme for premises across the main shopping areas in Waverley. The scheme is designed to both encourage owners to make their premises more accessible, reward those who have taken on board suggestions and to provide information to the disabled about which shops, restaurants etc are accessible. A Faith Forum has also been set up in the past year and has focused on issues such as Housing Options, Financial Inclusion and access to services.
23. In terms of ethnicity, Waverley is predominantly white British (95.3%) with a small number of ethnic minorities. The results of the Place Survey suggests that Waverley has a high level of social cohesion. The percentage of people

who agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together was 82.1% which was the third highest in Surrey. However it is still important to reach out to minority groups and we will therefore be engaging with the Surrey Community Action Ethnic Minority Forum to find out what issues there may be. In addition we are forming links with the biggest ethnic minority group, the Gypsy and Traveller community, and, amongst other things, will be receiving cultural awareness training which will include Waverley contractors as well as staff. An excellent music project has been undertaken in the last year with young people from the Gypsy and Traveller community in the Dunsfold area in partnership with Waverley's Arts Community Development and the County's Youth Service.

Responsive Services and Customer Care

24. The Framework is intended to help local authorities personalise services to meet the needs of people with different backgrounds and ensure fair access.
25. Of particular importance is ensuring that the equality impact assessment (EqIA) process is robust with the implementation of action plans, equality proofing procurement and commissioning and monitoring access. All services have undertaken EqIAs and there is a rolling programme of review. The Corporate Equalities Group, headed by the Chief Executive, coordinate equality issues across the Council and ensure that the EqIA process is robust. Over the past year the EqIA paperwork has been redesigned to make it more user friendly and better suited to the new Framework. The use of EqIAs are imbedded within the Service Planning process and service managers are aware of the need to complete an EqIA for all new and changed policies, strategies and procedures and changes to service provision. It is essential however that all such work is shared with Portfolio Holders and that members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are able to challenge service managers to ensure there is no discrimination in the way we deliver services or in the way we propose to change services. One way of doing this would be to 'call-in' certain EqIAs which may be of interest to Overview and Scrutiny Committee members.

A Modern and Diverse Workforce

26. The ability to deliver responsive, personalised services will depend in a large part on the composition, skills, understanding and commitment of Waverley's workforce. The Framework aims to ensure that:
 - relevant equality objectives are built into workforce strategies
 - an understanding of the local labour market and the barriers equality groups face informs the setting of equality employment objectives
 - all major employment policies are equality assessed
 - plans are in place to improve representation at senior levels of woman and BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic)officers
 - training and development programmes address equality issues
 - there is effective action to address equal pay

- there is a workplace culture in which staff are treated with dignity and respect.
27. All major employment policies have been equality assessed and actions, where needed, have been identified and will be monitored. Recruitment performance is also being reviewed on a quarterly basis. A recent assessment for the period April to October has resulted in further awareness training being necessary for managers on disability issues.
28. There has been a great deal of training over the last year on equality and diversity issues. 52 staff have completed the Equality Certificate, 288 are currently working towards it and a further 113 are scheduled to sign up to undertake the certificate in the next few months. All senior managers and those carrying out equality impact assessments have been trained specifically on this issue. There are also general awareness courses being delivered to all other staff on equality and diversity issues. The outcome of this training will be to deliver services more effectively and responsively to people needs. It will also give staff a better understanding of the needs of customers within the specific equality target groups to ensure that no discrimination takes place. Further Member training is also being undertaken in January 2010.
29. Work on the equal pay audit has been completed and actions resulting from the audit will be implemented during 2010.

Equality Objectives and Aims

30. Service managers are including equality objectives within their Service Plans and Members will have an opportunity to assess these when Service Plans are considered during the January committee cycle. In addition it is proposed that the following objectives are added to our corporate objectives:
- To ensure fair and equal access to all the services we deliver
 - To understand our communities and to strive to achieve equal life chances for all
 - To achieve a balanced workforce which reflects the diversity of the community it serves
 - Work with our partners to develop cohesive communities
 - Work towards the elimination of all forms of discrimination and harassment
 - Positively promote equality through our actions and communications.

Peer Challenge

31. A peer challenge will be taking place in the authority on 2nd and 3rd March 2010. The challenge group, comprising two officers and one Member from

other local authorities, will evaluate where we are on the journey to become an excellent authority under the Equality Framework for Local Government. They will scrutinise how well we are performing under the 5 Performance Areas set out above and most importantly will investigate what outcomes have been delivered in our communities in terms of improving life chances.

Conclusion

32. A great deal of progress has been made on equality and diversity issues over the last year and important improvements have been made to service delivery and accessibility as a result.
33. Waverley can demonstrate that it is committed to ensuring all who live and work in the Borough have equal life chances. It has shown that through strong leadership and community partnership it is committed to creating an inclusive culture amongst our staff and the communities we serve. However there is always more to achieve. Much of the challenge is about simple awareness raising. Many people question why our customers are asked about their age, disability, gender. If we don't know who are customers are how can we deliver services effectively? By understanding our communities and their needs we can improve access to and satisfaction with our services.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that

1. the equality and diversity objectives are incorporated within Waverley's corporate objectives, and
2. members continue to undertake a role of scrutiny in the area of equalities.

Background Papers

The Equality Framework for Local Government 2009 published by the IDeA.

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