

LEVEL 3 OF THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an overview of The Council's achievements in order to be awarded Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government in November 2009.

2. Background

2.1 Achieving level 3 is a major milestone for the Council. However, not only did the Council achieve level 3, the Improvement and Development Agency assessors stated it was a 'good and solid level 3'.

2.2 When the assessors initially visited the Council in May 2009, it should be noted that their decision not to award Level 3 at that time was because the Council was only 'a hair's breadth away and the submission of further evidence by September 2009 should ensure a more favourable outcome'.

2.2 The Council's many equality achievements over the last two years demonstrate its commitment to embedding equality and diversity across everything that it does as an organisation (as an employer, a service provider, a commissioner of services and within its leadership role for communities).

2.3 The Council formally adopted the Equality Standard in October 2004 to show its commitment to addressing equality issues. The Council self-assessed for Level 2 of the Equality Standard in March 2007, but at this time did not have a dedicated post to progress equality and diversity issues further. Therefore a decision was made within the Corporate Services department to invest resources into such a post.

2.4 In November 2007 the Council successfully recruited a new Corporate Equality and Diversity Co-ordinator, Jacqui Cross. Shortly after, John Webb became the lead Director for equality and diversity, the Portfolio Holder for Community and Customer Engagement and Chair of the Excellence committee became equality Member champions, all of which has significantly improved the Council's capacity to provide the necessary leadership and expertise to ensure equality and diversity issues are embedded across the organisation.

2.5 The Council allocated resources, established a more robust governance infrastructure, involved key stakeholders, and set very clear aims and objectives in order to be awarded Level 3.

2.6 Regarding the equality agenda, the Council has led the way in Wirral in so many ways. For example:

- The Chief Executive personally overseeing the Level 3 action plan.

- Producing a single equality scheme that covers all six strands of equality (race, gender and transgender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and religion or belief).
- Developing an online equality and diversity training package for all staff and Members to ensure we all have the same level of awareness about the issues (5,100 staff and Members have completed the training).
- Organising an annual Diversity Day event at Wallasey Town Hall, attracting many people from across Wirral (nearly 1,000 people attended the last event in November 2009).
- Producing an equality impact assessment template that is now recognised as an example of best practice by the North West Employers' Organisation's Equality Gateway.
- Developing a brand for the Council's equality programme (Equality Watch and jellybeans) that is now recognised across Wirral's communities as the Council's commitment to equality issues.
- Producing an equality profile of the Council workforce to help us work towards being a more modern, diverse and representative organisation.
- Establishing a Corporate Equality Group that has resolved workforce issues, produced excellent policies and strategies, and has showcased numerous community services and activities.
- Producing quarterly equality monitoring reports that clearly highlight progress across all departments.
- Establishing an Equality Watch membership scheme which has over 300 members to date receiving newsletters and bulletins on a regular basis from the Council's equality and diversity team.
- Producing a Gender Identity policy in partnership with TransWirral to support any transgender member of staff or elected Member.
- Establishing Chief Officers as Champions for each of the equality strands.
- Understanding more the equality profile of our customer base in Wirral, in order to gain an insight into their experience of accessing and receiving Council services. This information will enable us to understand the nature and extent of inequalities in accessibility and standard of services.

3. Beyond Level 3

3.1 In order for Councils to be able to respond to new thinking on equality outcomes, the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) have developed a new Equality Framework for Local Government. This has now replaced the original Equality Standard.

3.2 Instead of reaching Levels 1 to 5, Councils will now work towards three levels:

- Developing
- Achieving
- Excellent

- 3.3 Any Council already at level 1 or 2 of the original Standard will automatically migrate to 'Developing' status, and any Council already at level 3 will migrate to 'Achieving' status, etc.
- 3.4 Wirral Council has automatically migrated to 'Achieving' status of the new Framework, and will need to be assessed for 'Excellent' status by March 2012 or risk having 'Achieving' status removed. Therefore, an action plan for reaching 'Excellent' status is currently being developed by the Corporate Equality and Diversity team.
- 3.5 A more detailed paper on the subject of the new Equalities Framework will be submitted to a future Cabinet meeting.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5. Staffing implications

- 5.1 There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

6. Equal Opportunities implications

- 6.1 The Council does meet its public duties to promote equality of opportunity, to eliminate any unlawful discrimination or harassment, to promote good relations and positive attitudes, and to promote involvement.

7. Community Safety implications

- 7.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

8. Local Agenda 21

- 8.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

9. Planning implications

- 9.1 There are no planning implications arising from this report.

10. Anti-poverty implications

- 10.1 There are no anti-poverty implications arising from this report

11. Social inclusion implications

- 11.1 There are no negative implications that will potentially exclude individuals or groups from accessing services arising from this report.

12. Local Member Support implications

- 12.1 There are no issues mentioned in the report that are particularly relevant to a ward or small number of wards. However, equality and cohesion are borough wide issues to be addressed by all members.

13. Recommendations

- 13.1 Cabinet notes the Council's Level 3 award, and asks that an action plan for reaching 'Excellent' status is presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

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