

WIRRAL COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PROGRAMME BOARD

WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 2011

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| SUBJECT: | EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT – COUNCIL PROGRESS TOWARDS EXCELLENT STATUS |
| WARD/S AFFECTED: | ALL |
| REPORT OF: | DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT |
| RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER: LEADER (FINANCE AND BEST VALUE) | COUNCILLOR JEFF GREEN |
| KEY DECISION | NO |

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting on 4 March 2010 the Programme Board received a report entitled Equality and Diversity – Council Progress and agreed to further develop the scrutiny function to incorporate the criteria of the Equality Framework for Local Government.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to remind Members of the Council's achievements in being awarded Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government in November 2009, to highlight the role for scrutiny to ensure that the Council reaches 'Excellent' status of the new Equality Framework for Local Government by November 2011 and to propose that the Scrutiny Programme Board and the five themed Overview and Scrutiny Committees each receives a presentation on the criteria of the Equality Framework for Local Government, at their first meetings in the new Municipal Year, so that Members are fully equipped to provide effective scrutiny in the areas identified as being necessary for Excellent accreditation by the November 2011 deadline.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the presentation is made by Jacqui Cross, Corporate Equality and Cohesion Manager, who is leading the Council's programme to reach 'Excellent' status.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That

- (1) the progress made to date with regard to the Equality Standard for Local Government be noted; and
- (2) this Programme Board and each of the five themed Overview and Scrutiny Committees be requested to receive a presentation to help them further develop the Council's Scrutiny Function so that the Council is on course to achieve excellent status of the new Equality Framework for Local Government in November 2011.

3.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 3.1 To ensure the Council is fulfilling all of the criteria necessary in respect of the Scrutiny Function for it to progress and be awarded excellent status in respect of the Equality Standard for Local Government in November 2011.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 At the Scrutiny Programme Board meeting on 4 March 2010 the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services provided Members with a report that contained an overview of the Council's achievements, which led to the award, in November 2009, of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
- 4.2 Achieving Level 3 had been a major milestone for the Council. Members had been made aware that the Improvement and Development Agency assessors had considered it to be a 'good and solid level 3'. Details of a number of appointments, which had significantly improved the Council's capacity to provide the necessary leadership had been provided and it had been noted that expertise to ensure that equality and diversity issues had been embedded across the organisation. The report had also set out examples of the ways in which the Council had led the way in Wirral in relation to the equality agenda.
- 4.3 The report had informed that the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) had developed a new Equality Framework for Local Government, which had now replaced the original Equality Standard. Instead of reaching Levels 1 to 5, Councils would now work towards the following three levels:
 - Developing
 - Achieving
 - Excellent
- 4.4 The Council had automatically migrated to 'Achieving' status of the new Framework and would need to be assessed for 'Excellent' status by November 2011 or risk having 'Achieving' status removed. Therefore, an action plan for reaching 'Excellent' status was currently being developed by the Corporate Equality and Diversity team.
- 4.5 The report had also set out a number of areas, highlighted by the new Equality Framework for Local Government, as being in need of effective scrutiny in order for the Council to reach 'Excellent' status by November 2011 and the Chair of the Council Excellence Overview and Scrutiny Committee had indicated that Equality and Diversity had been a major focus of her Committee

and she had referred to the work that had been undertaken to achieve Level 3 of the original Equality Standard.

5.0 BEYOND LEVEL 3 – EXCELLENT STATUS

5.1 The Action Plan for reaching 'Excellent' status, developed by the Corporate Equality and Diversity team, is currently being refreshed following:

- The publication of the Government's equality strategy, 'Building a Fairer Britain – December 2010, and
- The publication of the Council's Corporate Plan – publish date not yet known

6.0 THE ROLE OF SCRUTINY IN REACHING 'EXCELLENT' STATUS

6.1 The Equality Framework for Local Government highlights the need for effective scrutiny in the following areas:

- (a) Is the Council meeting its equality objectives in partnership with others?
- (b) Is the Council able to identify how communities are changing and the impact this may have on equality priorities?
- (c) Can the Council demonstrate improvements and outcomes as a result of its Equality Scheme?
- (d) Is the Council scrutinising its own and its partnerships' performance with regard to equality objectives and outcomes?
- (e) Can the Council demonstrate that commissioned/procured services are delivering the Council's equality objectives?
- (f) Are communities involved in the scrutiny process?
- (g) Do Members and Senior Officers demonstrate personal leadership and understand the relevance of equality and cohesion to their local communities?
- (h) Are equality impact assessments built into all aspects of decision-making, scrutiny and policy reviews?

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The report sets out the improvements necessary to the Scrutiny Function for the Council to attain Excellent status in respect of new Equality Framework for Local Government by November 2011. If the Scrutiny Function does not develop as indicated in the report the Council runs the risk of not attaining Excellent status.

8.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 There are no other options to consider at this time. The Council has indicated it wishes to pursue Excellent status.

9.0 CONSULTATION

9.1 The Council's single equality scheme 'Equality Watch Scheme 2009 – 2012 is due to be refreshed during April to June 2011 to take into consideration the Equality Act 2010. Consultations will take place across the Council, with partner agencies and among members of the Council's equality watch scheme.

10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

10.1 Any voluntary, community, faith sector organisation providing services on behalf of the Council will need to adopt acceptable equality practices as prescribed by the Council.

11.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

11.1 There are no additional resource implications.

12.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The Equality Act 2010 states that public bodies must have due regard to the need to (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, (b) advance equality of opportunity, and c) foster good relations.

13.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

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13.2 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- (a) Is an EIA required? No
- (b) If 'yes', has one been completed?

14.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

14.1 No

15.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

15.1 No

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

| Council Meeting | Date |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Scrutiny Programme Board | 4 March 2010 |