

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY
WDA/30/09

Recommendation

That Members approve the Equality and Diversity Policy attached at Appendix 1

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Report of the Director

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To consider and approve a Equality and Diversity Policy for the Authority

2. Background

- 2.1 The Equality Framework for local government in England was established in 2001 through a partnership between the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the DIALOG unit of the Employers' Organisation for local government, with advice from the Audit Commission.
- 2.2 Revised in 2006 following a major review, the Framework has been extended to address six equality strands: age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation. Since the original Framework was developed, new public sector duties have been introduced for race, disability and gender. The Framework works alongside these public sector duties to promote excellence in the management of equality outcome.
- 2.3 Over five levels of development, local authorities will introduce a comprehensive and systematic approach to dealing with equalities which will enable them to set targets and achieve outcomes appropriate to local need. These levels cover all aspects of policy-making, service delivery and employment.
- 2.4 Prevailing assumptions and current practices can set up barriers that prevent fair access to services and equal employment opportunities, which in turn can discriminate against people.
- 2.5 The Authority's Code of Conduct for Employees outlines the standards of conduct expected from employees and has been developed to use as a general guide and has links to other procedures that may regulate or guide the standards of conduct expected.

- 2.6 The Code of Conduct for Employees currently contains an Equal Opportunities Policy/Statement but does not address the area of Diversity.
- 2.7 The proposed Equality and Diversity Policy combines both areas of equality and diversity and ensures that all relevant employment legislation is fully addressed in line with the Equality Standard for Local Government.

3. Equality and Diversity Policy

- 3.1 The proposed Equality and Diversity Policy attached at Appendix 1 provides a way of working within the Authority that makes the mainstreaming of equality into service delivery and employment an issue for all aspects of the Authority's work.
- 3.2 Based on the Equality Framework for Local Government, the Policy details the systematic approach the Authority will adopt to ensure that set targets and outcomes in relation to equality issues are appropriate and relevant to the needs of the organisation.
- 3.3 The Policy covers all areas of current equality legislation in relation to age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation.
- 3.4 The Equality and Diversity Policy is based on the Equality Framework for Local Government which identifies five key levels:-
 - Level 1 Commitment to a Comprehensive Equality and Diversity Policy.
 - Level 2 Assessment and Community Engagement
 - Level 3 Setting Equality and Objectives Targets
 - Level 4 Information systems and monitoring targets
 - Level 5 Achieving and reviewing outcomes
- 3.5 The Authority needs to demonstrate its commitment to achieving high equality standards in relation to service provision, policy making, partnership working and employment issues and Member approval of the Equality and Diversity Policy is key to this process.
- 3.6 In practical terms the Policy will integrate a cycle of management activity to establish equality objectives for each service area and, on the base of these objectives, service areas will establish equality targets.
- 3.7 Achievement against these targets will be monitored and progress on the achievements of objectives will be measured and evaluated. Ultimately, the Authority will be able to show identifiable outcomes.

- 3.8 Consultation is seen as a key element in the equality and diversity agenda and ensures that the Authority is better informed to meet the needs of all service users and communities on Merseyside.
- 3.9 The Policy allows the Authority to build upon the views of both service users and employees with regard to proposed changes to plans or methods of service delivery by extending the consultation process to include equality issues.

4. Risk Implications

- 4.1 Failure to adopt the proposed Equality and Diversity Policy, which is applicable to all employees and services users of the Authority, could leave the Authority open to a claim of legal breach of employment duty in relation to age, disability, gender, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation.

5. HR Implications

- 5.1 The Equality and Diversity Policy reflects our commitment to equal opportunities. It is our promise to treat all employees, and potential employees, fairly and considerately and taking into account the different needs of our service users.
- 5.2 Training and awareness on Equality and Diversity will be given to all staff and Elected Members.

6. Environmental Implications

- 6.1 There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The Authority currently addresses equality through its Code of Conduct and Equal Opportunities Policy.
- 8.2 The proposed Equality and Diversity Policy covers the six legislative areas of equality which are age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

- 8.3 The Policy provides a way of working within the Authority that makes the mainstreaming of equality into service delivery and employment an issue for all aspects of the Authority's work.

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The background documents to this report are open to inspection in accordance with Section 100D of The Local Government Act 1972 - Nil.