

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

CABINET - 23 NOVEMBER 2006

PAPER BY THE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

EQUALITY SCHEME AND ACTION PLAN

This paper invites the Cabinet to comment on the draft Equality Scheme and Equality Action Plan, and delegate powers to approve the final versions for publication on 4 December to the Cabinet Member for Service Improvement.

Cabinet Members are also invited to agree that the Equality Scheme and Action Plan should contain an amended commitment to attain Level 5 of the Equality Standard "during 2007-08", rather than "by March 2007", to allow time for the assessment to be externally validated as required under the revised Equality Standard issued by the IDeA.

For decision

Background

1. The Council first established a Race Equality Scheme in 2002, followed by a Race Action Plan in 2004, to meet its statutory obligations under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. In 2005, the Council expanded the scope of these documents to cover age, disability, gender, faith and sexual orientation as well as race. They now need to be updated so that the Council can fulfil its new disability and gender equality duties, the first of which comes into force on 4 December 2006 and the latter in April 2007.
2. Notwithstanding this broadening of the Council's duties on equalities, the intention is to continue to have a single over-arching Equality Scheme and Action Plan, whilst complying with the requirement that it must be easy to distinguish which aims and actions contribute to which of the six equalities strands (race, disability, gender, faith, age and sexual orientation).
3. Cabinet Members agreed in July that the updated Equality Scheme and Action Plan should:
 - be based on the objectives relating to equality and inclusivity contained in the Community Strategy, which were developed by the Kensington and Chelsea Partnership (KCP) following extensive consultation with organisations and individuals across the borough.
 - reflect the Council's response to work carried out since the publication of the Community Strategy in November 2005, including "Inclusive

Kensington and Chelsea”, a report into the inclusion needs of disabled residents prepared by Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea (ADKC) with support from the KCP.

Community involvement

4. Over the summer, we have consulted with and involved community groups in the development of the Equality Scheme and Action Plan, using an approach designed to find out their views on:
 - whether there are further equality objectives that we should seek to deliver through our Equality Action Plan, in addition to those already developed in consultation with local people in the Community Strategy;
 - what specific actions the Council should take over the next three years to contribute to the achievement of these equality objectives.
5. The Council published “Developing your Council’s Equality Scheme and Action Plan: A Discussion Paper” for consultation on 3 August 2006 and circulated it to a wide range of local people and organisations.¹ To capture the views of hard-to-reach groups, we held facilitated focus groups with local people and in-depth discussions with groups of local organisations. The Equality Scheme contains a statement of community involvement, which explains how the views expressed by residents and local organisations have helped to shape the Equality Action Plan.

Equality Scheme

6. The draft Equality Scheme is at annex A. It introduces five over-arching themes:
 - Informing, communicating with and consulting residents;
 - Improving physical access to local facilities;
 - Delivering fair, relevant and accessible services;
 - Community leadership: influencing our partners and suppliers;
 - Our workforce: reflecting the community we serve.
7. Under each theme, the Equality Scheme sets out our aims (the relevant Community Strategy objectives for equality), our recent achievements and a selection of the key actions that we will take over the next three years.
8. The Equality Scheme also contains sections that provide a picture of diversity in Kensington and Chelsea, explain how we will monitor and report on our performance and set out the roles, responsibilities and resources that will support delivery.

Equality Action Plan

¹ This paper is available at: http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/Consultation/General/eqscheme_actionplan.pdf.

9. The draft Equality Action Plan is at annex B. It provides further details of how the Council will achieve the aims introduced in the Equality Scheme. Each aim is supported by timed actions, and in the majority of cases it has been possible to identify SMART targets to measure progress. A key is provided to enable the reader to identify easily which actions and targets will contribute to which of the six equality strands (ethnicity, gender, disability, age, faith and sexual orientation).
10. We have sought to reflect the Council's response to work carried out since the publication of the Community Strategy in November 2005 in the Equality Action Plan, and we have adopted ADKC's recommendations where appropriate. Cabinet Members will be aware that an Overview and Scrutiny Review of access to services for disabled people is currently drawing to a close. There is a high degree of congruence between its draft recommendations and the activity proposed in the Equality Action Plan.

Revised Equality Standard

11. Cabinet Members will recall that the Council's current Equality Scheme and Action Plan contains a commitment to attain Level 5 of the Equality Standard for Local Government by March 2007.
12. In the normal course of business, we would have begun a corporate audit of evidence in December, and used this to provide a self-assessment of whether the Council has achieved Level 5 by April 2007. However, the IDeA's revised Equality Standard for Local Government contains a new requirement for external validation of claims to have achieved Level 5. Under the new arrangements, the external assessors will expect self-assessments of every service to be completed and aggregated to provide a self-assessment of each business group and, ultimately, of the Council as a whole. Many aspects of this process remain unclear, including:
 - what external assessors will expect a self-assessment to contain;
 - how authorities' should decide which services comprise an individual unit for the purposes of self-assessment;
 - what level business groups should assess themselves as having achieved, if each of their component services achieve different levels;
 - what methods the assessors will use to validate the self-assessment (e.g. analysis of supporting evidence, interviews, focus groups etc.).
13. Until more detailed information about the external assessment process is provided, we will not be able to ensure that our self-assessment arrangements meet the IDeA's expectations. The Cabinet is therefore invited to agree that the new Equality Scheme and Action Plan should contain an amended commitment to attain Level 5 "during 2007-08", rather than "by March 2007".

Conclusion

14. The Cabinet is invited to:

- to comment on the draft Equality Scheme and Equality Action Plan, and delegate powers to approve the final versions for publication to the Cabinet Member for Service Improvement.
- note the new requirement for external validation of claims to have achieved Level 5 of the Equality Standard, and agree that the Council's commitment to achieve Level 5 "by March 2007" should be amended to "during 2007-08" in the new Equality Scheme and Action Plan.

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Background papers: None.

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