

**CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY – ACTION PLAN PROGRESS
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being))**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 2nd June 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) considered a report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships, which outlined the progress made to date in respect of the Council's Corporate Equality Policy Action Plan.

2. COMMENTS

- 2.1 The Panel has been informed by the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy of the background to the Plan, together with details of the achievements made by the Council in this respect over the previous year. Having been reminded that the Council has attained Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government, Members have been advised that the Council is now working towards achieving Level 3 of the Standard. A prerequisite of this is the completion of a series of evidence based Equality Impact Assessments. External assessment for validation is due to be undertaken in July 2009 and Officers are optimistic about the outcome. Should the Council be successful this will be significant for Huntingdonshire's classification under the new Equality Framework, which replaces the Equality Standard. While the Appendices to the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships contain details of work that still needs to be completed, it is emphasised that this work does not need to have been completed but the Council does need to be able to demonstrate that it is making progress towards finishing this work.
- 2.2 The Panel has been advised that an annual random sample survey is usually conducted by the Council to ascertain residents' perceptions of Council services including their views on how the Council rates on equalities matters. This year, however, these views have been sought via the Place Survey, though it is stressed that the questions asked differ from those previously employed, which accounts for the change in response rates. The survey will be repeated at least every two years.
- 2.3 In noting that the Action Plan is intended to address equalities relating to race, disability and gender, the Panel has commented that rurality and, specifically, access to services in rural areas should be regarded as an equality issue. While Members have been assured that the Council is addressing the particular requirements of customers in rural areas, they have suggested that this should be made more overt, by incorporating it within the Action Plan.
- 2.4 The Panel has discussed the training on equality and diversity that is provided for employees and the introduction of a new e-learning course. The theme of equality is also included within the Council's Corporate Induction Programme and sessions on equalities are offered to all Managers to enable them to ensure front-line Officers use acceptable behaviour. In addition, the Corporate

Officer Group has responsibilities in this area and the Council's corporate feedback procedure is monitored for equalities implications of complaints.

- 2.5 The Panel has expressed some concern at the 10% reduction in the budget set aside by the Council to deliver the Action Plan, but Members have received assurances that the work required to complete Equality Impact Assessments can be undertaken within the allocated budget in the forthcoming year.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 The Cabinet is invited to consider the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) as part of its deliberations on the report by the Head of People, Performance and Partnerships.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Minutes and Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) on 2nd June 2009.

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