
ATTAINMENT OF LEVEL 3 OF THE EQUALITY STANDARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Responsible Cabinet Member - Leader of the Council, Councillor John Williams
Responsible Director – Assistant Chief Executive, Lorraine O’Donnell

Purpose of Report

1. To summarise, further to a detailed Cabinet report of 1st November 2005, the Council’s attainment of level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government and to seek endorsement of our contributory actions. Council is receiving this paper as part of the requirement under the Equality Standard for Local Government that the Council is accountable for its equalities performance.

Background

2. The Equality Standard for Local Government is a system for continuous improvement through equality management. To attain level 3, an authority must have implemented its commitment to the equalities agenda by becoming involved in the detailed setting of equality objectives and targets. The Corporate Equalities Review and Plan document endorsed by Cabinet on 1st November, sets out how the Council has done most of its work in this area.
3. Concomitant with the publication of this Cabinet report was the development of external challenge by Doug Feery Associates. They found that our attainment of level 3 was conditional upon making a formal response to their thirteen recommendations. These are summarised below.

Information and Analysis

| Recommendation | Action |
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| 1. Puts in place the arrangements necessary to undertake self-assessment on a departmental basis. | Darlington Borough Council’s self-assessments have taken place with both corporate and departmental input. The reporting template has been amended so that both that departmental and corporate representatives sign-off the evidence presented. |

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| <p>2. Strengthen the Equalities Impact Needs/Requirements Assessment (INRA) work by ensuring that written and unwritten policies are identified and programmed for assessment and that requirements are tightened to bring all departments up to the standard of the best.</p> | <p>Review of INRAs has commenced in the light of Doug Feery and Associates' analysis. Arrangements are being developed to ensure that new or amended policies are impact assessed before being considered by Members.</p> |
| <p>3. The actions arising from the INRA to be built into the mainstream business planning process.</p> | <p>All significant actions arising from INRA are transferred into departmental service plans.</p> |
| <p>4. Ensure that senior managers, including Directors and Assistant Directors, have a better understanding of, and more responsibility for, delivering the equalities agenda.</p> | <p>Doug Feery presented his findings to CMT and departmental equalities updates have been given to departmental management teams and senior management teams, to remind officers and managers of their responsibilities for implementation. The Director of Corporate Services and the Assistant Chief Executive continue to be involved in the Strategic Social Inclusion Group.</p> |
| <p>5. Address the issue of resources by ensuring that all actions arising from the INRAs are costed and resources identified and approved for their implementation through the business planning system.</p> | <p>The Council's Corporate Planning Network is currently working to link service planning and financial planning systems. This will lead to a closer alignment of budgets with Council priorities. Further progress in this area will be made during 2006. Most actions arising from Impact Needs/Requirements Assessment are about changing the way that the Council does business within the framework of existing resources.</p> |
| <p>6. Finalise monitoring arrangements for the delivery of equality objectives and ensure that the new IT system (Performance Plus) is capable of accommodating and reporting on these.</p> | <p>Performance monitoring information for BVPIs 2a and 2b have now been entered into Performance Plus, the Council's Performance Management System. Reporting on equalities objectives is now possible and will be undertaken in 2006/07.</p> |
| <p>7. Strengthen the corporate scrutiny of equality progress by ensuring that this</p> | <p>New approach to scrutiny via the Monitoring and Co-ordination Group.</p> |

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| becomes part of the mainstream activity of the council's scrutiny process. | |
| 8. Procurement – we recommend a more joined-up approach to procurement and equalities issues. | Equalities in Procurement guidance published in Corporate Equalities Review and Plan. |
| 9. Procurement – we recommend that an equality screening of all contracts and contract types is undertaken to provide the basis for developing appropriate equality guidelines. | Sample screening of a range of contracts undertaken and reported to the Inclusion Implementation Group. Report contains recommendations for performance improvement to be implemented by Inclusion Implementation Group/Corporate Procurement Network as appropriate. |
| 10. Procurement – we recommend, therefore, that clear equality improvement objectives and targets be set across all departments with contracting and procurement function. | Equalities in Procurement guidance published in Corporate Equalities Review and Plan. |
| 11. Consultation – further developmental work with Community Partnerships to advance their understanding of equalities. | This recommendation to be taken forward by Doug Feery Associates as part of the Putting the Quality into Equality project. Delay due to change of personnel at DFA. |

- Officers agree that the actions described above mark the completion of the Council's work to attain level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Legal Implications

- This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

- The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

7. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Conclusion

8. It is appropriate for the Council to deliver improvements in its equalities performance in the context of a strategic approach to the whole social inclusion agenda. The best way of doing this is to charge the Social Inclusion Implementation Group with the task of producing subsequent Corporate Equalities Plan and Review documents as required.
9. It is suggested that the Council undergoes a period of consolidation before embarking on the attainment of level 4. The Strategic Social Inclusion Group have recommended that this means that level 4 will not now be attained until March 2008.

Recommendation

10. Council are requested to:-
 - (a) Further to Cabinet's endorsement of the second Corporate Equalities Review and Plan, endorse the contents of this report as evidence of attainment of level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
 - (b) endorse the revision of the timetable for the attainment of level 4.

Reasons

11. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government cannot be attained without Council approval of the evidence provided.
 - (b) A sustainable claim for level 4 cannot be made until the Council's attainment at level 3 has been consolidated.

Lorraine O'Donnell
Assistant Chief Executive

Background Papers

There are no background papers

David Plews: 2023
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