

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Deputy Chief Executive **REPORT NUMBER:** **J137**
TO: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY** **DATE OF MEETING:** 17 November 2009
 (STEWARDSHIP) COMMITTEE

BABERGH'S APPROACH TO MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To explain key features of the Local Government New Equality Framework.
- 1.2 To advise that Babergh's Equality and Diversity work is being progressed by the Fairness and Equal Access Group (FEAG).
- 1.3 To set out the aims of the Group, as set out in paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3 of this report.
- 1.4 To seek approval to the approach being taken by the Group as set out in paragraphs 8.1 to 8.5 of this report.
- 1.5 To provide a summary of the Action Plan for each of the five themes of the New Equality Framework, and provide an overview of work to be undertaken in 2009/10 and 2010/11.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the approach being taken, and progress achieved, to obtain the "Achieving" level of the New Equality Framework be noted.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 No new financial resources are sought for the work set out in this paper. The approach will be to realign existing resources and to deliver outcomes which are proportionate to the challenges faced and take account of the capacity to deliver.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risk No. 6 – Culture and Change Management. Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Failure to understand and meet the needs of the vulnerable in our communities and a failure to reduce inequalities	Significant	Critical on the most vulnerable	Adopt the approach set out in this report
Failure to progress towards obtaining the “Achieving” level of the New Equalities Framework will adversely impact on future external assessments on Babergh’s performance – and consequently on Babergh’s reputation	Significant	Marginal	Adopt the approach set out in this report

5. **KEY FEATURES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEW EQUALITY FRAMEWORK**

5.1 The New Framework applies to the following six equality groups, with the top three highlighted already enshrined in current legislation – and hence with a particular immediate relevance. The others are included within the Equality Bill which is progressing through Parliament:

- **Age**
- **Race and Ethnicity**
- **Disability**
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion and Belief
- Gender

However, this list does not exclude the addition of other groups that may reflect specific issues facing a section of a council’s residents (e.g. an ageing population or rurality).

5.2 Councils will be classified under one of the following three levels of achievement:

- Development (Level 1-2 under previous system)
- Achieving (Level 3-4 under previous system)
- Excellent (Level 5-6 under previous system)

5.3 Babergh, having achieved Level 2 under the previous system, automatically transfers to the “Development” level.

5.4 To obtain the “Achieving” level, Babergh will need to have in place an Action Plan which sets out how prescribed criteria are met in each of the following “themed” areas (Babergh’s lead officers for each of the themes is shown in brackets):

- Knowing your Community and Equality Mapping (Paul Simon, Communications and PR Manager)

- Place Shaping, Leadership and Organisational Commitment (Mike Hammond, Deputy Chief Executive)
- Community Engagement and Satisfaction (Chris Foti, Head of Community Development)
- Responsive Services and Customer Care (Bob Southgate, Head of Customer Services)
- A Modern and Diverse Workforce (Jeanette Bray, HR and OD Manager)

5.5 Achievement of the “Achieving” level will be subject to an external assessment.

6. **BABERGH’S FAIRNESS AND EQUAL ACCESS GROUP (FEAG)**

6.1 The Action Plan to obtain the “Achieving” level is being designed and implemented by Babergh’s FEAG.

6.2 This group was previously Babergh’s Equality and Diversity Group and was renamed as a way of emphasising the feeling by members of the group that what are referred to as Equality and Diversity issues are at heart about ensuring that all people, of whatever background, ability, orientation or faith, are able to access Council services in a fair way.

6.3 Membership of the group has been reviewed and now includes fourteen members of staff from all the Council’s divisions and includes a representative from Unison and Councillor David Wood in his capacity as Member Champion on Equalities.

6.4 The group is led by the Deputy Chief Executive and, as set out in paragraph 5.4, leadership and delivery of each of the five themed areas of the New Framework is allocated to a group member.

7. **THE AIMS OF BABERGH’S FEAG**

7.1 To ensure all of Babergh’s communities have fair and equal access to quality services.

7.2 To support the development of a modern and diverse workforce.

7.3 To obtain the “Achieving” level of the New Equality Framework in 2010/11.

8. **THE APPROACH BEING TAKEN BY BABERGH’S FEAG**

8.1 The group seeks to learn from “best practice” from elsewhere by:

- membership of the Communities of Practice put in place by the IDeA, which is a vehicle for exchange of ideas, advice, etc.
- engagement with and learning from other councils, e.g. Castle Point District Council

The group has identified its training and development needs and has commissioned EERA to provide that training.

- 8.2 Whilst processes are important in the external assessment, the group's main focus will be on outcomes.
- 8.3 In line with the advice from the EERA trainer, Rowena Kerr, Babergh is aware of the particular importance accorded by inspectors to the three existing equality groups (age, race and ethnicity, disability) – although this will not be to the exclusion of the others.
- 8.4 In addition, and as advised by Castle Point District Council, the group is taking a pragmatic but challenging approach in designing and delivering the Action Plan. The approach is to ensure action delivers outcomes which are proportionate to the challenges faced, and take into account the capacity to deliver. Whilst Castle Point invested additional resources into their Equalities Group, Babergh's approach, in view of our savings and efficiencies agenda, will be to realign existing resources and prioritise existing workloads.
- 8.5 In the Action Plan, the group will bring together Babergh's work on fairness and equal access. This work will build upon, and become embedded into, existing structures and processes rather than creating new processes and structures. Thus the group will work with existing partnerships, e.g. the Babergh East LSP and the West Suffolk LSP. In addition the management, monitoring and review of the work of the group and the outcomes achieved by the Action Plan will be embedded into Babergh's existing performance management, review and budget setting processes, e.g. by ensuring an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is embedded into our Strategic Financial Planning process.
- 8.6 We are suggesting taking a two-step approach to communicating the aims and outputs of Babergh's efforts to reach "Achieving" status under the new Equality Framework.
- 8.7 The first stage will involve communicating the existence of the FEAG and its objectives to a range of stakeholder groups: Members, managers' forum, team leaders' forum and all staff. Because of the need for a clear communication of the Group's existence and remit, it is suggested that various members of the Group deliver a short presentation at the most appropriate opportunity to their divisional team meetings.
- 8.8 The second and longer-term stage aims to demonstrate the positive outcomes of a culture that is more aware of equality outcomes – across all six equality groups plus those relating to residents over 60/65 and those suffering from rural-related deprivation. Since we are keen that equality practices should be mainstreamed across the authority, we intend to reflect that in terms of how we communicate the outcomes of our work. Rather than using specific 'equalities' publications, we will embed articles in existing communications channels such as Babergh Matters!, Food Wise and the Babergh Tenants' newsletter.
- 8.9 Furthermore, in order to demonstrate the positive outcomes of our equality work, we aim that any articles will be case study based – i.e. focussing on individuals or groups rather than a coverage of aggregate data.

9. **SUMMARY OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR EACH OF THE FIVE THEMES**

Theme 1 – Knowing Your Community and Equality Mapping (Theme Leader: Paul Simon)

- 9.1 The group working on this theme are providing both an initial database of quantitative information and qualitative insights – whether collected centrally or at divisional level – to inform the Council as to the characteristics of its population and any equality challenges.
- 9.2 A number of the initial actions have already been completed, including – for the first time – the establishment of a centralised spreadsheet which has been set up and populated with a range of data (including Census information, health profiles and insights from frontline Babergh staff as part of the CAST programme). This is already being used by the Policy Team and the aim is to make this available for general access on BEN.
- 9.3 This group will ensure the Action Plan is relevant to all six equality criteria (i.e. age, gender, disability, religion/faith, race and sexuality), plus the impact of an ageing Babergh population and rural deprivation. This additional targeted strategy is partly influenced by the example of Castle Point District Council, who felt that a pragmatic approach to mainstreaming equality and equal access would be more likely to engage staff and Members and reflected the need to maximise results within tight financial constraints.
- 9.4 In the former case, this will involve Babergh contributing to a Suffolk County Council initiative aimed at establishing countywide data sharing protocols for all partners, including the LSPs.

Theme 2 – Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment (Theme Leader: Mike Hammond)

- 9.5 This group seeks to ensure that there is widespread support and action for the overall aims of the Action Plan among senior officers and Members. The outcomes to be achieved include:
- All staff can visibly see our commitment to fairness and equality
 - Babergh is able to demonstrate an embedded culture and awareness of equality and fairness issues.
- 9.6 This group will ensure that progress against the Action Plan is formally reported to the Overview & Scrutiny (Community Services) Committee and fed into the review and planning of our 3-year plans and budgets, as well as senior representatives in partner organisations.

Theme 3 – Community Engagement and Satisfaction (Theme Leader: Chris Foti)

- 9.7 This theme is seeking to ensure Babergh achieves effective community engagement through its existing structures and partnerships, e.g. LSPs, Suffolk Speaks, Babergh Communities Together. Through these partnerships and structures we test the effectiveness of our Action Plan and seek to identify any gaps or future challenges.

Theme 4 – Responsive Services and Customer Care (Theme Leader: Bob Southgate)

- 9.8 This group will plan, review and challenge EIAs, especially in light of the insights provided by the work of Theme 1.
- 9.9 The group will, where possible, spread equality-relevant work to include the work carried out on Babergh's behalf by key partners. For example, Babergh will seek to ensure that all those who suffer domestic abuse or violence, be that from a partner or from other family members, have clear information about what services are available to support and help them tackle such unacceptable behaviour. Babergh needs to work with its partners, principally the Police, to ensure that the services that exist to help victims of abuse are properly publicised and targeted at key hard-to-reach groups. It is also important that people's experience of using these services is a positive and useful one.

Theme 5 – A Modern and Diverse Workforce (Theme Leader: Jeanette Bray)

- 9.10 This group will ensure that staff are given the awareness and support needed to meet the challenges presented elsewhere in the overall Action Plan.
- 9.11 A key component of this will be the establishment of a well-researched and comprehensive Workforce Development Plan, from which it is anticipated that equality and diversity outcomes will be embedded across the Council in our target and priority setting, in our work with partners and in the training we provide to staff and Members.
- 9.12 As set out above, each of the themes has a number of people from the FEAG working on it and they have produced Theme Action Plans as part of the overall Action Plan, detailing tasks, lead officers, timescales and outcomes. These plans can be viewed on BEN under "Equality Framework Action Plans".
- 9.13 The plans will be reviewed and refined following the training to be provided by EERA, any further advice from our Best Practice contacts, and from feedback from our LSP partners.
- 9.14 The Action Plan, together with the existing commitments in Babergh's 1 and 3 year plans, will result in the following 2009/10- 2010/11 Fairness and Equal Access Work Programme:
- (a) Age – our EIAs on specific services, and then applying the learning from these assessments, will focus on the over 60s and over 85s. This will be the main focus of our work programme in 2009/10. It may be possible for this work to contribute to increasing public confidence in community safety as whilst Babergh is a low crime area, the fear of crime amongst some of our elderly residents appears high. Current examples of our work in this area include free swimming for over 60s and concessionary travel for over 60s. In addition it is likely that, with the threat of increasing youth unemployment, work will be undertaken on addressing the needs of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETS), e.g. Hadleigh NEETS Scheme and the proposed countywide apprenticeship scheme.

- (b) Race and Ethnicity – this will be a major piece of work over the next two years which will focus on identifying and providing for the needs of our gypsy and traveller communities.
- (c) Disability – whilst Babergh provides a range of services for the diverse needs of this group, e.g. disabled adaptations, concessionary travel, reduced cost for some services (green waste service, for example) and Be Active, our overall knowledge of the needs of this group must be improved. Hence during the year consideration will be given as to how and whether our work on equality mapping can add to our knowledge of this group.
- (d) Sexual Orientation – our knowledge of the needs of this community is poor. Hence during the year, through Suffolk Speaks, a survey seeking to identify the needs of the gay and lesbian community will be undertaken.
- (e) Religion and Belief – during the year we will be seeking to develop stronger links with, and knowledge of, these groups. Work has progressed in that for the first time ever we have successfully recruited representatives of the faith groups on both the Babergh East and West Suffolk LSPs.
- (f) Gender – in terms of workforce development, the results and lessons from our Equal Pay Audit will be analysed and appropriate actions developed.

9.15 In addition to the above, Babergh’s FEAG work over the next two years will also include:

- Review of Choice Based Lettings Scheme – this is a service to some of the most vulnerable in our community. Once the scheme has been operating for several months we will review its effectiveness and, in particular, its vulnerable persons’ strategy, and apply any lessons learnt to ensure that all sections of the community are able to access the information and support provided by the scheme.
- Consultation with a representative sample of our community on our future budget setting and priorities. This will be achieved via Suffolk Speaks by establishing a Babergh Community Focus Group, supplemented by an on-line survey.

10. **APPENDICES**

None.

11. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO**

None.

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