

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Mike Hammond, Deputy CEO and
Chair of Equality and Diversity
Steering Group

REPORT NUMBER: **H214**

TO: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(STEWARDSHIP) COMMITTEE**

DATE OF MEETING: 24 March 2009

BABERGH'S PROGRESS ON EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to update the committee on:

- Progress on maintaining and embedding Level 2 of the Local Government Equality Standard (LGES), which is to be replaced by a new Equality Framework for Local Government – see section 5.
- Anticipated features and challenges of the new Equality Framework for Local Government – see section 6.
- Actions being taken to prepare the Council for the new Equality Framework and improve our performance – see section 7.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 That the progress made on equalities and diversity in 2008/09 as set out in the report be noted.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no financial implications in this report.

4. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risks No.4 (Political Leadership and Governance) and No.10 (Local Response to National Issues). Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
The Council is unable to meet the duties placed upon it under various equalities legislation.	Low	Critical	The actions and achievements set out in this report.

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
The Council is unable to respond to the challenges presented by the new Equality framework for local government.	Low	Marginal	The actions set out in this report and the plan to migrate to the new standard.

5. **KEY INFORMATION**

What we have done and achieved

- 5.1 We have developed a Strategic Plan which sets out a 10 year vision for the district and in particular the following ambitions under the theme “Vibrant Places and Strong Communities”:
- Public services appropriately reflect the need, aspirations and choices of individuals from different groups, such as older people, in their design, resourcing and delivery
 - Individuals have a sense of belonging within cohesive communities where everyone is valued
- 5.2 We have continued to develop the role of the already well-established Equality and Diversity Steering Group, which consists of Councillor David Wood as the Member Champion for Equalities, Deputy Chief Executive, a Unison representative and staff from across all divisions of the Council. (The Equalities Champion at Management Team is the Deputy Chief Executive). The Equality and Diversity Steering Group is responsible for driving the equality agenda across the Council.
- 5.3 We have up-dated the Local Government Equality Standard (LGES) Level 2 Action Plan following the last meeting of the Steering Group. Since self-assessing at Level 2 in September 2008, Babergh has maintained and consolidated its Level 2 position. (The LGES has five levels with Level 5 representing the highest performance. Accreditation at Level 3 and above requires an external peer review – usually undertaken by the Improvement and Development Agency.)
- 5.4 We have put in place a robust monitoring arrangement whereby the Equality and Diversity Steering Group will report on delivering the Equalities and Diversity agenda to Management Team/Head of Service and onto Overview and Scrutiny (Stewardship) Committee on a six-monthly basis. In addition, the corporate health PI’s, which include ‘equality in employment’ indicators are reported to HR Panel.
- 5.5 We have developed a Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan approved by Council on 21 October 2008, which will deliver and embed Level 2 of the LGES.

- 5.6 We have up-dated the Equality Policy approved by Council on 21 October 2008, which reflects the recent changes in equalities' legislation and incorporates all six equality strands including race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age.
- 5.7 We have developed a programme of prioritised Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screenings which were completed by all service managers in all divisions and published these on Babergh's website.
- 5.8 We have in place a Consultation Strategy which, following the development of the Strategic Plan is currently under review. However, various consultations have been undertaken to reach under represented groups such as young people and Polish workers. Through 'Suffolk Speaks' we consulted on gender issues and the impact of rural isolation. Between July and September 2008 we consulted with the community, staff and stakeholder groups on the Single Equality Scheme and new Equalities Policy, making available an appropriate range of formats on request. We also continue to consult with our service users through customer and tenant satisfaction surveys.
- 5.9 We have developed a Procurement Strategy which ensures that equalities are taken into account in the procurement of goods, works and services.
- 5.10 We have a well-established programme of equalities training in place which covers the induction of new staff. Additional equalities training currently being developed, investigated or commissioned will include:
- Equality Impact Assessment training for service managers
 - Refresher recruitment and selection training for all officers with staff responsibilities
 - Development training for the Equalities and Diversity Steering Group

Our equalities training covers all six equality strands.

A self-assessment questionnaire has recently been sent to Members, the replies from which will form the basis of the 2009/10 Members' training and development. The training will include equalities and diversity.

- 5.11 We have in process an equal pay review, from which an equal pay policy will be developed and any issues identified through this will be addressed.
- 5.12 We have an organisational development plan and a workforce development plan is being investigated and developed.
- 5.13 We have a standard range of applications forms in place that are clear and explicit and available from the website and in paper form. Person specifications are now established and used for every vacancy closely linked to job profile and utilised for shortlisting. These measures will help to reinforce our commitment to equality and fairness in the recruitment process.

What difference has this made?

The focus in 2008/09 has been to develop a better understanding of our community and service users and this is beginning to impact on service delivery. For example:-

- 5.14 The EqIA screening on Choice Based Lettings (CBL) identified that the full impact of the CBL scheme would not be known until the scheme had been in place long enough to establish a meaningful statistical base. Consequently, a full EqIA is now on-going, the outcome of which will ensure that:
- The legal requirements of letting social housing are met.
 - Customers in the highest assessed need are assisted.
 - The best use of existing housing stock is made.
 - A consistent lettings process across the sub-region is provided, so properties are let in a fair and transparent way.
 - Increased choice and information to customers in the allocation of social housing is provided.
 - Vulnerable customers assessing available homes are supported.
 - Customers are not discriminated against whether directly or indirectly.
 - A wider housing options approach in supporting customers to meet their housing needs is provided.
 - Mobility across the sub-region is improved.
 - Social inclusion and help to achieve sustainable communities is promoted.
- 5.15 Some severely disabled residents in the district, who by the nature of their disability are unable to use or access local bus services, have benefited by the discretionary concessionary travel policy the Council operates. Vouchers to the value of £100 are granted to those residents to use at their discretion with local taxi services.
- 5.16 The new private hire scheme for Sudbury is intended to require that all new taxi licences are for vehicles with disabled adaptations.
- 5.17 Commissioning the services of local voluntary sector advisers has helped to ensure that advice is geared towards the client group in need of services, including helping younger and older people in appropriate ways where necessary.
- 5.18 The Council provides an enhanced response time for the repair and maintenance requirements of vulnerable older residents.
- 5.19 Identification labels are provided in Braille to allow visually impaired customers to differentiate between the three coloured bins.

5.20 The Be Active leisure inclusion scheme has been designed to meet the needs of vulnerable service users, young people at risk of offending and disabled people of all ages.

5.21 Free swimming has been made available for under 16s and over 60s.

5.22 The 2008 Babergh Youth Conference was attended by teenagers aged between 12 and 16 years old who participated in interactive workshops aimed at understanding, respecting and celebrating different cultures.

6. **ANTICIPATED FEATURES AND CHALLENGES OF THE NEW EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT (EFLG)**

6.1 The new Equality Framework for Local Government comes into effect on 1 April 2009 and seeks to:

- provide a simpler framework, reduce the amount of monitoring processes and introduce a more outcome-focused approach.
- encourage the use of the Framework so that it is proportional and relevant to the needs and circumstances of the authority.
- simplify the self-assessment process backed by peer challenge.
- integrate the public duties on race, disability and gender and provide a common framework for compliance.
- enable local authorities and their Local Strategic Partnerships to identify and analyse equality priorities for inclusion in their Local Area Agreements and complement the new performance assessment framework, the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which will take effect from April 2009.
- allow authorities to 'migrate' their achievements under the original Equality Standard.

6.2 The Framework has been constructed around five areas of change management:

1. Knowing your community – equality mapping.
2. Place shaping, leadership, partnership and organisational commitment.
3. Community engagement and satisfaction.
4. Responsive services and customer care.
5. A modern and diverse workforce.

Whilst these reflect the original Equality Standard, they relate more directly to The Comprehensive Area Assessment and new Use of Resources assessment. Each of the five areas will present new and different challenges for the Council.

6.3 Classification on the new Framework is expected to be as follows:

- Levels 1-5 of the ESLG will be replaced by three levels: 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent'
- Authorities such as Babergh who achieved Level 1 and Level 2 under the ESLG will be classified as 'Developing'.
- There will be Peer Assessment for authorities at 'Achieving' and 'Excellent' Level.

At each of the new levels, authorities will be assessed on the five change management areas shown above in 6.2.

7. **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO PREPARE THE COUNCIL FOR THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND IMPROVE OUR PERFORMANCE**

Action	Lead Officer	By When
7.1 Increase capacity and knowledge of equalities issues and access help available from external agencies by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ engaging with Improvement East and EERA Support Programme and attending regional workshops on topics such as Impact Assessments, Procurement, Development of Single Equality Scheme 	Deputy Chief Executive supported by Senior Policy and Performance Officer and HR&OD Manager to decide whether programmes are appropriate and affordable, and ensure appropriate officers attend	Application made, costs to be ascertained. Programmes to run throughout the year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ applying for the "In Authority" support package (focused on assisting authorities such as BDC) 	Deputy Chief Executive supported by Senior Policy and Performance Officer and HR&OD Manager to decide whether programme is appropriate and affordable	Expression of Interest submitted, costs to be ascertained. Programme to run throughout the year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ learning from best practice from elsewhere. The Corporate Director from Castle Point DC (which has achieved Level 4 of the existing standard) to meet with representatives of the Steering Group 	Deputy Chief Executive with representatives of the Steering Group	6 April 2009

Action	Lead Officer	By When
<p>7.2 Increase competency and capacity of the Equalities and Diversity Steering Group by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HoS/Directors discussing with their divisional representative(s) on the Group who is best able to represent the Division in the future, taking into account the five challenges at paragraph 4.2 ▪ providing training and development to the Group, led by a facilitator, in order to increase the group's knowledge of their roles and responsibilities 	<p>Deputy Chief Executive supported by HR&OD Manager</p>	<p>By 31 March 2009</p> <p>Q1 (of 2009/10)</p>
<p>7.3 Embed leadership of equalities throughout the organisation by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ training and development of MT/HoS ▪ training and development of middle managers and team leaders 	<p>HR&OD Manager under programme to be agreed with Deputy Chief Executive Ditto</p>	<p>Q1 (of 2009/10)</p> <p>Q2/Q3 (of 2009/10)</p>
<p>7.4 Ensure BDC achieves highest level of performance it can under new framework by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ researching criteria for Use of Resources and for attaining the "Achieving" level of the New Equality Framework. Draft an Action Plan for attaining "Achievable" level, setting out who does what, when, and resource implications, and report to MT/HoS on 10/07/09. 	<p>Senior Policy and Performance Officer/ Deputy Chief Executive</p>	<p>Q1 (of 2009/10)</p>

Action	Lead Officer	By When
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commence implementation of Action Plan, engaging with MT/HoS and middle managers. Report on progress to MT/HoS in September 2009 and onto O&S (S) on 17/11/09 	Senior Policy and Performance Officer/ Deputy Chief Executive	Q2 (of 2009/10)

8. **APPENDICES**

None.

9. **BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO**

None.

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