

**LEICESTERSHIRE TOGETHER (Local Strategic  
Partnership) BOARD**

**Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2008**

**DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO EQUALITY AND  
DIVERSITY**

**REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC SENIOR OFFICER GROUP (SSOG)**

**Background**

The attached report was considered by the Strategic Senior Officer Group (SSOG) at its meeting on May 28<sup>th</sup> 2008.

**Recommendation**

**It is recommended that the Board:**

- (a) Oversee collaborative work by all relevant public authorities to achieve the highest levels of the new equality framework**
- (b) Oversee the development of a partnership Equality and Diversity Strategy**
- (c) Ensure that the Equalities Monitoring Policy developed by the Leicestershire Equalities Forum, is fully implemented, including through the establishment of appropriate systems and data sharing arrangements**
- (d) Approve the establishment of an Advisory Group made up of third sector representatives from the 6 equalities strands**

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## LEICESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC SENIOR OFFICERS' GROUP

28 MAY 2008

### DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH TO EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

#### REPORT OF LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

1. All Leicestershire Together partners have a responsibility for ensuring that equality and diversity considerations are taken into account in the development and delivery of services across the County. This report highlights current areas of activity and identifies where and how these could be developed in a partnership context. The proposals include:
  - Working together to achieve the highest levels of the new equality framework and engaging people in this process
  - Developing a partnership Equality and Diversity Strategy
  - Implementing the Equalities Monitoring Policy developed by the Leicestershire Equalities Forum, setting up appropriate systems and developing data sharing arrangements
  - Working together to involve and engage people across all 6 equalities strands, including by establishing an Advisory Group made up of third sector representatives from the 6 equalities strands

#### **National Equality Framework**

2. All local authorities in Leicestershire have adopted the Equality Standard for Local Government, a framework which assists councils to embed a high standard of equality and diversity practice in all that it does. There are 5 Levels – Level 1 being the lowest and Level 5 the highest.
3. The County Council has achieved Level 2 of the Standard and is working to achieve Level 3 by December 2008. Leicestershire's District and Borough councils are all at differing levels of achievement of the Equality Standard. Other public authorities, such as the Police and the Fire Service, are also working to a similar standard aimed at mainstreaming equality and diversity.
4. The IDeA is currently developing a new equality framework which will supersede the Equality Standard. This will be out for consultation in May 2008 and there will be a period of migration from the Standard into the new framework.
5. The current Equality Standard includes a requirement to produce a Participation Strategy to show how we will ensure that communities at risk of discrimination are engaged in the decision-making process. This links directly to the Leicestershire Together Engagement Framework and the work of the Community Forums.

**There is potential for Leicestershire Together to develop a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to achieving the highest levels of the new equality framework for all public authorities in the county.**

**There are also opportunities for all public authorities in Leicestershire to work together to develop an effective approach to engaging and involving people from the 6 equality strands. Some groups will need to be supported and empowered to secure their involvement.**

### **Single Equality Scheme/ Partnership Equality and Diversity Strategy**

6. Public authorities currently have legal duties to prepare equality schemes which show how they intend to ensure equality for people from all racial backgrounds, disabled people and women, men, girls and boys. The Single Equality Act extends this legal duty to cover people of all ages, of all religions or (non-political) beliefs and sexual orientation.
7. The County Council has developed a Equality and Diversity Strategy which is the first step in achieving a combined approach. The draft Strategy is attached as Appendix A. However, there are understandably areas in which the Strategy needs to be developed further – particularly in the council's approach towards achieving equality for people of all ages, religions or beliefs and sexual orientation.
8. The draft Strategy highlights the importance of working in partnership to achieve equality and diversity objectives. This could be strengthened further through a co-ordinated approach to achieving equality and diversity objectives at a partnership level – with other public authorities as well as the third sector.
9. The Leicestershire Equalities Forum (LEF), an action in the first Leicestershire Community Strategy, was formed in late 2007. Membership consists of Equalities Officers from each of the District, Borough, City and County Council's and has recently been extended to a range of other public authorities across Leicester Shire. The Forum is considering opportunities to achieve added-value objectives that can only be achieved in partnership.

**The development of a partnership Equality and Diversity Strategy, which would link in to the priority Equality and Diversity objectives contained in the Leicestershire Together Sustainable Community Strategy, would assist in the planning for future LAAs and MAAs and ensure that there is a more co-ordinated approach to equality and diversity in Leicestershire.**

### **Partnerships**

10. Equalities is one of the key themes of the Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy and the outcomes all require combined action to ensure that they are achieved.
11. Leicestershire Together needs to ensure that equality of opportunity and outcomes, fairness and respect are all considered as a fundamental component in all decision-making, including the development and implementation of thematic and outcome delivery plans against LAA2.

**An advisory group on equality and diversity, made up of representatives from all 6 equality strands from the third sector, could**

**be created to advise and support the Leicestershire Together Partnership. This group could also support all public authorities in terms of scrutinising progress made towards achieving their equality and diversity objectives, including those set out in the SCS and LAA2.**

## **Performance Management**

12. Performance management is critical to the effective delivery of outcomes around equality and diversity and is something that has to be considered by all partners. In many organisations, the current performance measurement of equalities focuses mainly on processes and there is the need for it to become much more outcome based.
13. The integration and mainstreaming of equalities into the Leicestershire Performance Framework (including the LAA) is imperative and will be done in part by identifying specific equality objectives and performance measures (indicators) and disaggregating others by the 6 equality strands - race, disability, gender, age, religion or belief and sexual orientation. These measures will need to be evidenced through monitoring the equality of outcomes of services and employment practices by reviewing service take-up, service impact (through, for example, the Equality Impact Assessment process), customer feedback and perceptions.

## **Equality Monitoring**

14. All public authorities need information about the characteristics of the local population, users and potential users of services and staff if they are to understand whether or not they are providing equality of access to services and employment and whether or not they are meeting people's needs.
15. Equality Monitoring is central to the principle of ensuring continuous improvement and is important for effective performance management. Outcomes of equality monitoring need to be analysed and actions to address issues need to be set out in service plans.

**An Equality Monitoring Policy has been developed in partnership with the Leicestershire Equalities Forum and, it is envisaged, will be used by all public authorities in Leicestershire. It aims to ensure a consistent approach by providing guidance on what and when to monitor and which questions to ask. This is attached at Appendix B.**

16. By applying the same process and asking the same questions when undertaking research or monitoring service usage, we will generate data that can be shared across, and will be useful to, all public authorities. This will inform policy development and service improvement across the partnership.

**However, work needs to be done to ensure that there are adequate systems in place to collect, on a consistent basis, the information required. There would also need to be an agreed protocol for sharing this data between partners.**

## **Equality Impact Assessments**

17. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) form part of public authorities' commitment to improving equality practice and are a fundamental component of the Equality Standard for Local Government.
18. They are required by law. The Race Relations Amendment Act, The Disability Discrimination Act and the amended Sex Discrimination Act all require local authorities to assess the impact of their functions, policies, practices and services, or the likely impact of any that are proposed, on equality.
19. All public authorities need to consider equality as they make their decisions. An EIA is a way of ensuring that this is done and they are essential in meeting the statutory equality duties.
20. The benefits of EIAs include:
  - helping to identify whether we are excluding different groups from any of our services
  - helping to identify direct or indirect discrimination
  - assisting us in considering alternative policies or measures that might address any adverse impact
  - helping mainstream equality in our policies and practices
  - helping us to target resources more effectively
  - helping us to better understand the needs and aspirations of the diverse communities we serve
  - helping us to reality check our policies and services with the people affected by them.
21. Assessments must consider the implications of what is being assessed for all the six equality strands. In addition to undertaking EIAs on those functions, policies, procedures and services developed or delivered directly, EIAs also need to be undertaken on those that are contracted out and that have been developed or delivered in partnership. The latter provides the opportunity for joint assessments on specific services or policies.

### **Recommendation:**

**That SSOG consider the paragraphs highlighted in bold in the report and agree to:**

- **Work together to achieve the highest levels of the new equality framework**
- **Develop a partnership Equality and Diversity Strategy**
- **Implement the Equalities Monitoring Policy developed by the Leicestershire Equalities Forum, setting up appropriate systems and developing data sharing arrangements**
- **Establish an Advisory Group made up of third sector representatives from the 6 equalities strands**

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