

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Agenda Item 23

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Equalities & Inclusion Policy		
Date of Meeting:	15th July 2008		
Report of:	Director of Strategy & Governance		
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Key Decision:	Yes	Forward Plan No: CAB 2363	
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 The Council's Inclusive Council Policy 2004-2007 set the policy framework and priorities for equalities work in the City Council. This new Equalities & Inclusion Policy builds on our achievements and sets out policy and priorities for the next three years 2008-2011.
- 1.2 The new Equality Scheme Action Plan pulls together outstanding actions from our existing Race Equality Scheme 2005-2008, Disability Equality Scheme 2006-2009 and Gender Equality Scheme 2007-2010 into a single plan. This enables us to broaden our actions to include the other equalities strands of sexual orientation, age and religion/belief and address all equalities issues and issues of poverty and deprivation in a more systematic and strategic way
- 1.3 The Equality Scheme Action Plan will be reviewed annually to ensure progress is made and to build in new actions as appropriate.
- 1.4 The Equalities & Inclusion Policy and Equality Scheme Action Plan are scheduled for Cabinet decision on 18th September 2008 and Council on 9th October 2008.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) That members provide feedback on the Equalities & Inclusion Policy and Equality Scheme Action Plan to help shape the final versions that go forward to Cabinet.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- 3.1 The Council has clear statutory responsibilities to address issues of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. The existing three Equalities Schemes address these responsibilities in relation to Race, Disability and Gender. They are however all subject to annual review and specific issues have been highlighted by Internal Audit and the Equalities Forum that the new Equalities & Inclusion Policy seeks to address. Most notably this means an inclusion of mental health issues and of actions to tackle harassment of disabled people.
- 3.2 The Reducing Inequality Review undertaken in 2007 highlights the issue of continuing deprivation within the city and specific issues in relation to data quality, mental health and worklessness. These issues cannot be tackled by the Council working in isolation and the new Equalities & Inclusion Policy seeks to support the continuation and extension of effective partnership working to address them.
- 3.3 The national picture has been changing with the creation of the Equalities & Human Rights Commission and the move towards a Single Equality Act. This new Equalities & Inclusion Policy and Equality Scheme Action Plan puts the City Council in a better position to respond to these changes by providing a single Equality Scheme which can incorporate all equalities strands as well as issues of poverty and deprivation.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Consultation events were held with members and community representatives on 12th July 2007 and 15th January 2008. The draft policy was taken to Equalities Forum on 24th September 2007 and 11th February 2008.
- 4.2 Set out below are other issues highlighted within the consultation process and the way that they have been addressed in the new policy and action plan.

(1) Equalities Forum was seen as too bureaucratic and difficult to access. Reports were often too complicated and it was difficult to ensure accountability

The new City Inclusion Partnership is intended to provide clearer city-wide leadership and accountability. The new Equality Scheme Action Plan provides greater clarity on outstanding actions.

(2) The first draft of the new policy included a new Consultation Framework. This did not have the support of community groups and there was concern that the Council would rely on this for its consultation arrangement

The Consultation Framework has been replaced with a new piece of work to develop a Community Engagement Framework. This will include a wider range of

activity as well as clear protocol for community engagement and is currently under consultation.

(3) Concern was expressed that issues for faith groups have not been sufficiently addressed in Council policy.

Work is underway to ensure that we address our statutory responsibilities in relation to religion and belief and this is included within the action plan. Further work will be undertaken with religion groups to build better mechanisms for consultation and feedback

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 None directly in relation to this report

Legal Implications:

5.2 Our statutory responsibilities in relation to equalities are directly addressed by the Equalities & Inclusion Policy and the Equality Scheme Action Plan.

Equalities Implications:

5.3 The equalities implications are directly addressed by the Equalities & Inclusion Policy and the Equalities Scheme Action Plan.

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 None directly in relation to this report

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5 The Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and the Partnership Community Safety Team are key contributors to equalities & inclusion work in the city and this is reflected in the Equalities & Inclusion Policy and the Equalities Scheme Action Plan

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.6 The implications for risk are directly addressed by the Equalities & Inclusion Policy and the Equalities Scheme Action Plan.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.7 The Equality Scheme Action Plan has been developed with input from all council Directorates.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Equalities & Inclusion Policy 2008-2011
2. Equalities Scheme Action Plan