

**TO: EXECUTIVE
22 JULY 2014**

**LGA EQUALITY PEER REVIEW 2013/14
Director of Corporate Services – Community Engagement and Equalities**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Peer Review report attached at Annex one summarises the findings of the review. The Executive is asked to endorse the proposal to work towards the “excellent” level of the Framework and the development of an action plan to implement the recommendations of the review.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 that the peer review report (at Annex one) and its recommendations be noted;
- 2.2 the proposal to work towards ‘Excellent’ level be endorsed, starting with a production of a self-assessment and gap analysis; and
- 2.3 that the development of an action plan be endorsed to respond to the Peer Report recommendations and subject to the endorsement at 2.2 to include the initial actions required to work towards ‘Excellent’ level

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council asked the LGA to complete a re-accreditation of the Council “achieving” level of the Equality Framework for Local Government. The Equality Peer Challenge in March 2014 endorsed the Council’s attainment of the “achieving” level of the Framework.
- 3.2 The Equality Peer Challenge report at Annexe one makes a number of recommendations to consolidate the Council’s “achieving” status. The reviewers also made several suggestions for other actions we could take to achieve the “excellent” level.
- 3.3 Working on the Equality Framework for Local Government supports medium term objective 11 to seek to ensure that every resident feels included and able to access the services they need. It also enables the Council to demonstrate our compliance with our legal duties in the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations in the community.
- 3.4 Striving to achieve the “excellent” level reflects the spirit of improvement with which the Council originally went into the challenge in 2010 and fits with the ethos of moving from ‘Good to Great’.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The recommendations in the report from the peer reviewers closely reflect existing objectives for the Council therefore we did not consider not taking action on them.

- 4.2 Maintaining the achieving standard for a further period without striving towards the more stringent excellent level would risk stagnating the Council's current progress and would not be in the spirit of the 'Good to Great' programme.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Equality Peer Challenge took place on 28 March 2014. The reviewers were Councillor Kay Hammond, Surrey County Council; Irena Hergottova, Walsall Borough Council and Gill Elliot, Local Government Association. The Council attained reaccreditation at the "achieving" level of the Equality Framework from this review. In addition to reference to completing actions identified in the Council's own self-assessment the three key recommendations from the review report were:

- How can regeneration of the town centre and other commercial developments in the future be harnessed to provide more opportunities for developing skills and providing more local jobs? The Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration could help make links to other Council priorities and strategies.
- Although it's clear that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are being embedded within the Council, it might be timely to review training for Members and staff to ensure that full EIAs consistently contain SMART Action and that all Members know how to use them to assist their decision making. This includes giving consideration to cumulative EIAs on savings or major service redesigns.
- Consider what more could be done to assist in developing a workforce that is more representative of an increasingly diverse community within the Borough. This might include some positive action.

- 5.2 The report also included areas of consideration under the equalities framework's key headings:

- Knowing your communities
- Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment
- Community engagement and satisfaction
- Responsive services and customer care
- A skilled and committed workforce

It is proposed that we will develop these recommendations into an action plan.

- 5.3 During the Peer Review the reviewers challenged the Council's decision to maintain the "achieving" level and the Peer Report reiterates that the Council is in a good position to commit to achieving the "excellent" level. Maintaining the "achieving" level and demonstrating areas of excellence during the current economic downturn is recognition of the embedded nature of promoting equalities within the Council and its practices moving forward. The Leader in his role as Executive Member for Community Cohesion and Strategy fully supports the development of an enhanced action plan to try to achieve the excellent level of the Equality Framework.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Nothing to add to the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 Nothing to add to the report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Developing this action plan will help us address the areas for improvement in relation to the Council's approach to equalities both identified by our own self assessment and those highlighted by the Peer Report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Not applicable. The report does not contain any recommendations impacting on strategic risk management issues.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 Equality Sub Group and Corporate Management Team

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Meetings

Representations Received

- 7.3 Incorporated into report.

Background Papers

Equality Peer Challenge Report, 28 March 2014

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