

**REPORT TO: NEIGHBOURHOOD RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
– 20 OCTOBER 2003**

REPORT ON: EQUALITY SCHEMES – CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

REPORT BY: HEAD OF COMMUNITIES

REPORT NO: 624-2003

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval for recommendations arising out of the community and related organisations consultation on the Council's Equality Schemes 2002-2005.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended the Committee:

- 2.1 note the consultation feedback on the Equality Schemes and agree the production of an abridged version for public use.
- 2.2 refer the concerns outlined in Para 7.1 to the Equality Task Groups for prioritisation and further development over future policy development on equalities.
- 2.3 approve the proposals outlined in Para 7.3 with regard to equalities consultation particularly in relation to the protocol on consultation being compiled under community planning.
- 2.4 approve the Council supporting the establishment of a Dundee Equalities Partnership to advance equalities issues under community planning collaborative mechanisms.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The support for an Equalities Partnership can be contained within the Communities budget under a Service Level Agreement.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This report provides a summary of the outcomes of recent consultations with equality groups and with the general public on the City Council's Equality Schemes. It also recommends action or future consultation. Both of these will help to ensure that the views and needs of service users from diverse backgrounds are taken fully into account.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The report's main aim is to develop Dundee City Council's approach to consulting and involving excluded groups in the planning and development of services relevant to their needs. The establishment of an Equalities Partnership will allow equalities organisations to collaborate and assist the Community Planning partners to work closer to deliver common approaches to equalities issues.

6.0 BACKGROUND

- 6.1 Since the adoption of the City Council's Equality Schemes on Disability, Race, Gender and Sexuality in November 2002, (Report No 782–2002 refers), the Equality Task Groups have conducted a wide-ranging consultation on their content and format. The purpose of this has been to ascertain broadly whether there is support for the Council's proposed methods and

procedures for achieving equality, as defined by the Equality Standard contained in each of the Schemes, and to assess which methods of consultation work best.

- 6.2 The Task Groups consulted voluntary sector groups with specific remits for minority ethnic, disabled and LGBT people and women. "Mainstream" organisations in both voluntary and public service sectors were also consulted. Comments were welcomed either from individuals or on behalf of groups.
- 6.3 In general, the comments received were very favourable. The Schemes were welcomed as a major improvement on the previous policy statement, and the mainstreaming of equality into Council functions and activities was regarded as very positive development. The Gender and Sexuality Equality Scheme was particularly welcomed as a way of highlighting the Council's commitment on this issue.

7.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESULTS

7.1 The main concerns of those consulted may be summarised as follows:

- A degree of scepticism on the part of a small number of respondents as to whether the Schemes would achieve their objectives.
- A substantial majority of respondents were concerned about communication of information, both on the Schemes themselves and on Council services in general. This was usually expressed as a request for more or better access to interpreters and translated material, to alternative formats such as large print, signed video and Braille and to the use of plain English in Council publications.
- Physical access to buildings, the built environment and services was also highlighted.
- Access to job opportunities with the Council and to careers advice was an important issue.
- Training for staff in awareness of the needs of diverse groups was another commonly raised issue
- The need for public service providers to work together to provide relevant services on an equal basis to all.

It is recommended that these issues be remitted to the relevant Equality Task Groups to build into the Equality Scheme implementation plans.

7.2 The following methods were used during the consultation:

- Postal questionnaires to voluntary groups connected to equality remits. Postal questionnaires were also sent to "mainstream" community groups and the Council's public sector partner organisations.
- Meetings with a number of voluntary sector groups to brief them on the Schemes and receive feedback.
- A specific consultation meeting for ethnic minority groups, in the City Chambers
- Informal discussions facilitated by Community Contact Workers on the Equality Action Team.
- The inclusion of questions on Council Services in a confidential survey for the LGBT community.
- Briefings for Council teams working with community Groups e.g. Youth Strategy Team, Neighbourhood Development Officers.

Each of these served a different purpose in attempting to ensure that many people could be consulted at times, places and in circumstances to suit their needs. For some groups, mixed gender meetings would be deemed inappropriate. For others, certain times of the day or week would clash with work or religious commitments. Equally, public meetings are unsuitable to those who may wish to remain anonymous or who wish to make their comments in confidence. Some groups enjoyed the experience of attending a meeting in the Council Chambers, while others felt this to be too formal and opted in future to be

visited at their own premises. The importance of accessible venues and appropriate support e.g. loop systems, interpreters, suitable catering was also highlighted by many of those consulted.

- 7.3 All of these methods resulted in useful feedback from the public and partner agencies on the Schemes, and it is recommended that they all continue to be used as part of an ongoing process of consultation on new Equality initiatives, and as a way of communicating progress on the implementation of the Schemes. It is equally important that all proposed changes to policy, plans and procedures of the Council are consulted on for their potential equality implications. It is therefore further recommended that any consultation undertaken on these should ensure target equality groups are represented. This could be done by working directly with the Task Groups to link to their consultation events or by seeking advice from the Equality Action Team when arranging a consultation exercise.
- 7.4 The Management and Co-ordinating Groups of the Dundee Partnership tasked their equalities personnel to explore the establishment of a common group to take forward a more unified approach to the discharge of equalities responsibilities and policy consultation post the new statutory responsibilities to implement equalities dimensions within mainstream public services.

This task was discussed with neighbouring Councils to establish whether or not a Tayside Partnership would be a more efficient method to achieve the objective especially as several community planning partners operate across the full area.

After discussion, this was not seen as practical as each community planning partner had different geographical priorities and different policy priorities.

It has, however, been possible to reach support in Dundee for the establishment of a Dundee Equalities Partnership to represent the interests of equalities groups/organisations and public sector community planning partners to advance equalities issues in a common format to avoid participant confusion over differences in expectation and service delivery.

The Partnership is able to be resourced technically by the community planning partners, equalities personnel and the Communities Department has revenue provision to assist with administrative support arrangements.

The Committee is asked to endorse this development to further improve contact and liaison over equalities with key groups within the voluntary and statutory sectors.

8.0 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 This Report proposes that consultation on the City Council's Equality Schemes, and on the equality implications of proposed changes to policy and plans should be a continuing process. It is clear from this initial exercise that using a limited approach to consultation may not always fully involve harder to reach groups such as those covered by the Equality Schemes. Consultation with the equality target groups must ensure that all of them are given an opportunity to participate, that confidentiality is guaranteed and that cultural and religious customs are respected. By adopting the variety of methods recommended in this report, there is a greater chance that the results will be representative of the full diversity of Dundee's population.

The establishment of an Equalities Partnership will facilitate the ongoing dialogue and liaison over the above issues.

9.0 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 Consultation has taken place with the Chief Executive and all members of the Council's Management Team. The Dundee Partnership Co-ordinating Group are in agreement with the recommendations made in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report

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3 October 2003