

EQUALITIES AUDIT

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1. Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek agreement to a process for consideration of the equalities audit report and the production of an action plan.

2. Summary

2.1 The audit against the equalities standard has now been completed by Jean Kelly Consultancy and a report produced. The Authority is revealed as a fairly typical council in that of the five levels it broadly achieves level two, with good progress toward level three in some areas. The report is complex and makes extensive recommendations for the contents of action plans to improve the Council's showing against the standards. A process is required to take stock of the report's details and develop a practical action plan.

3. Recommendations

3.1 It is recommended that the Committee;

- (a) notes the completion of the audit and the circulation of the report in "News for Members";
- (b) notes the positive progress being made towards level 3 of the standard (paragraph 5.5); and
- (c) agrees the suggested process for taking stock of the report and developing an action plan in discussion with all services and relevant external agencies (paragraph 5.6).

4. **Background**

4.1 In 1997 the Authority adopted the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) standard for local government . In doing so it decided that the scope of the standard should be widened to embrace gender and disability issues also.

4.2 In February 1999, following a competitive tendering exercise, Jean Kelly Consultancy was appointed to undertake an audit of the Council's current position against the expanded standard. The audit was undertaken during March-May 1999 and the report is now available.

5. **Issues and Choices.**

5.1 The full audit report has been circulated in the Committee's News for Members.

5.2 The Equality Standard covers six areas of activity:

- (a) policy and planning;
- (b) service delivery and customer care;
- (c) community development;
- (d) employment (recruitment and selection);
- (e) employment (developing and retaining staff); and
- (f) marketing and corporate image.

5.3 For each of these activity areas, there are five levels of achievement. Evidence of the Council's position against these was gathered through a combination of desk research and interviews. A fuller description of the methodology can be found in the audit report.

5.4 The audit report shows that across the six areas of activity the Council generally reaches Level 2, though some work is required to consolidate achievement at this level. In two of the areas - service delivery and customer care and community development - the Council achieves Level 3. The consultant has identified "*clear pockets of good practice in Milton Keynes Council on both the service delivery and employment side of the Council's work*".

5.5 The audit report includes suggested corporate and directorate action plans to fully implement the Standards at Level 2 and continue progress at the higher levels.

5.6 To maximise progress towards consolidating equalities practice and improving the Council's performance it is recommended that the following actions are taken:

- (a) the audit report and suggested actions are widely circulated amongst Members and officers;

- (b) discussions, workshops or briefings are held to consider the audit and suggested actions and devise clear corporate and directorate action plans;
- (c) relevant organisations are consulted and involved in the development of all action plans, in particular the Racial Equality Council, the Council of Disabled People and Unison;
- (d) the final plans to be widely circulated to officers and members and made available to the public; and
- (e) the final plans should be reported to this Committee, the Community Learning Committee, the Neighbourhood Services Committee and the Environment Committee and that annual reports on progress be made to these Committees.

5.7 Particular reference will need to be made to the findings of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry, a summary of which is to be found on this agenda.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The pursuit of equalities objectives contributes to a sustainable local community.

6.2 Equalities

The report concerns an audit of the Council's approach to equalities

6.3 Financial

The implementation of elements of the action plan developed through the proposed process may require funding in due course

6.4 Legal

The Commission for Racial Equality developed the Standard to assist local authorities in meeting their statutory duty under Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976, to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial equality.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Aspects of the audit relate directly to staff recruitment and training and the accessibility of council premises.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The audit is a valuable starting point for the development of an action plan to address equalities issues. All services and appropriate external agencies need to be engaged in this process.

Background Papers: Milton Keynes Council Equalities Audit Report (circulated with News for Members)

Summary of report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (see Item 15)