

**TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP OF PANEL**

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 To promote discussion on the Panel's Terms of Reference; the frequency of the meetings; and to note the Panel's role and powers and consider the involvement of external organisations in its work.

**2. Summary**

2.1 At its meeting on 13 July 1999 (Minute PR14/00 refers), the Policy and Resources Committee agreed that an Equalities Panel should be established to oversee the development and implementation of equal opportunity policy. This report examines the Terms of Reference, frequency of meetings and the involvement of external organisations in the work of the Panel.

**3. Recommendations**

3.1 That the Policy and Resources Committee be recommended to adopt the revised Terms of Reference.

3.2 That the Panel meet on a quarterly basis.

3.3 That the advisory role of the Panel be noted.

3.4 That the involvement of the following core external organisations in meetings of the Panel be agreed:

- (a) Victim Support;
- (b) Racial Equality Council;
- (c) The Council of Disabled People;
- (d) Milton Keynes Women and Work;
- (e) Milton Keynes Council of Voluntary Organisations; and

(f) Milton Keynes Christian Council

#### 4. **Background**

4.1 At its meeting on 13 July 1999 (Minute PR14/00 refers), the Policy and Resources Committee resolved that a Panel be established to monitor and ensure the early implementation of the recommendations contained in the Equalities Audit and the Stephen Lawrence report.

4.2 The Policy and Resources Committee also resolved that a number of actions should be taken arising from the report. One of which would be to hold discussions, workshops or briefings to consider the Equalities Audit and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report, with a view to developing corporate and directorate action plans to implement the recommendations in the report.

#### 5. **Issues and Choices**

5.1 The Panel may wish to consider adopting the Terms of Reference attached as an **Annex** to this report to widen the scope of the Panel's brief beyond that initially agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee in order to cover equalities issues throughout the Council.

5.2 It is suggested that the Panel should generally meet quarterly, although the Panel may wish to consider meeting in October after the planned Equalities Workshop has taken place so that it can discuss and recommend that the Policy and Resources Committee approves the draft Action Plan/s.

5.3 The core role of the Equalities Panel would therefore be to oversee the development and implementation of equal opportunity policy for the Council and to advise on how it can be improved and sustained. This will include the implementation of the Commission for Racial Equality's (CRE) standard for Local Government 'Racial Equality means Quality' that has been widened to include gender and disability issues. It is intended that the Panel will receive regular reports on progress, which will include an annual report against the standard.

5.4 The Panel does not have any delegated powers for decision making or dedicated budget. However, it can discuss and advise and make recommendations which can be agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee and therefore influence the work of the whole Council.

5.5 The Council's Policy and Resources Committee agreed that relevant organisations should be consulted and involved in the development of all action plans, including the Racial Equality Council, The Council of Disabled People and Unison.

5.6 Equalities is a subject that covers both internal and external activities and for this reason the involvement of external organisations that have an expertise in equality issues will be key to the successful development and implementation of the action plans.

5.7 The Panel is invited to note the advisory role of the Panel and consider the involvement of external organisations in the Panel. The following organisations have been invited to participate in the forthcoming Equalities Workshop:

- (a) Victim Support;
- (b) Racial Equality Council;
- (c) The Council of Disabled People;
- (d) Milton Keynes Women and Work;
- (e) Milton Keynes Council of Voluntary Organisations; and
- (f) Milton Keynes Christian Council.

The Panel may wish to identify other organisations it considers appropriate to invite.

5.8 The Council has in the past, through the former Equal Opportunities Consultative Group and Equalities Panel involved external organisations in a variety of different ways:

- (a) membership of the Group/Panel (a small fixed number);
- (b) the ability to place items on the agenda;
- (c) the opportunity to attend or comment on a particular item, even if the organisation was not formally a member;
- (d) participation in the annual seminar; and
- (e) participation in occasional seminars.

5.9 Given that the Audit has highlighted the need to achieve equalities improvements and the effective implementation of action plans, the Panel may wish to focus on action first, with the help of a small number of representatives rather than embark on an ambitious programme of involvement which may dilute that focus.

## 6. **Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

None.

### 6.2 Equalities

The Panel is responsible for equalities policy and implementation.

### 6.3 Financial

The Panel has the opportunity to influence how the resources of the whole Council are used. The Panel has no budget allocated to it. There are no dedicated staff resources to work specifically on the equalities policy.

6.4 Legal

Developing an action plan will help the Council meet its statutory responsibility under Section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976, to eliminate racial discrimination and promote racial equality.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

None

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The Equalities Panel will have a major role in ensuring the development and implementation of Equalities Policies within the Council. The involvement of external organisations with an expertise in Equality issues and Terms of Reference that will be key to its success

Background Papers: None