

Report

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Report to:	Equal Opportunities Forum
Date of Meeting:	29 June 2010
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Annual Report on Mainstreaming Equalities and Diversity - Housing and Technical Resources
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ advise the Forum of the work being undertaken by Housing and Technical Resources to meet the commitments in the Council's Single Equality Scheme, Equal Opportunities Policy and Equality and Diversity Strategy.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Forum is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the work being undertaken by Housing and Technical Resources be noted.

3. Background

3.1. Housing and Technical Resources has a well established Equality and Diversity Co-ordinating Group with representation from each of the 3 service areas (Area, Property and Support Services), as well as the Joint Trades Unions. The Group's primary role is to co-ordinate and monitor the progress of the Resource Equality and Diversity Action Plan. The Group also provides a strategic overview of equalities issues and supports a consistent approach to mainstreaming equality within the Resource.

3.2. The Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Action Plan sets out objectives and priority actions in relation to managing the equality and diversity agenda and mainstreaming equalities within Housing and Technical Resources. This report outlines the progress made to date in implementing the action plan in 2009/10.

4. Impact Assessment

4.1. All new and revised policies and functions are subject to an equality and human rights impact assessment (EQIA). In 2009/10 the Resource completed 58 impact assessments and published 55 (the remaining 3 were published in the current financial year), exceeding the target of 20. This increase is due to the number of additional assessments which were completed in relation to the budget and efficiency savings.

5. Employment

5.1. Officers employed within the Resource continue to take advantage of the family friendly policies offered by the Council. The uptake for 2009/10 is as follows, with the previous years figures in brackets:-

- ◆ 7 (6) employees are currently on a career break or sabbatical
- ◆ 312 (268) employees work part time
- ◆ 83 (48) new flexible working applications have been approved
- ◆ 20 (11) employees have taken paternity leave
- ◆ 193 (187) employees bought enhanced leave provision

5.2. Since 1996, Housing and Technical Resources has participated in the School to Work programme. During this time 239 people have been recruited into the Craft Apprenticeship Programme, with a further 10 places being allocated for the 2010 intake. This figure includes 23 adult apprentices from within Housing and Technical Resources.

Since 2004, the Resource has also participated in the Council's "What's with Work" initiative which encourages school pupils in 3rd and 4th year to participate in construction related training as part of their curriculum. During 2009/10, 60 pupils participated in this programme within Housing and Technical Resources.

5.3. The positive action programme Delivering a Fairer Future was formally launched in February 2007 to address the findings from the Equal Pay Review and ensure compliance with our duties under the Gender Equality Scheme. In 2009/10, 183 posts in Housing and Technical Resources were identified as 'Delivering a Fairer Future' posts and a total of 311 related applications were received.

5.4. With assistance from the Government's "Future Jobs Funding" programme, the Resource has supported 10 individuals with 6 months temporary employment in an attempt to assist them back into the "world of work". Feedback from candidates and managers involved has been positive. It is intended that the Resource will continue with this programme, offering a similar number of placements over the duration of the initiative, likely to be 18 - 24 months.

5.5. The Blantyre Business and Training Unit continued to work in partnership with other agencies and departments such as the Careers Service, Social Work and Education Resources, to provide training and employment opportunities for adults and young people who may find it difficult to access these. A total of 159 trainees were progressed through various training programmes in 2009/10. 24% went on to achieve full time employment across a range of dedicated placement companies. This initiative has transferred to Corporate Resources from 2010/11.

6. Employee Training and Development

6.1. The Resource continues to deliver a major training programme in relation to Equality and Diversity. A total of 2,113 Housing and Technical Resources employees have participated in a range of 19 different training courses on equality and diversity in 2009/10 including:-

- ◆ Deaf awareness
- ◆ Disability Awareness
- ◆ Diversity in the Workplace
- ◆ British Sign Language

6.2. Notable training events included:-

- 6.2.1. The Forum Interactive World Café training was specifically designed for Housing Services and delivered to 700 employees from Area, Property and Support Services throughout the year. The training aimed to challenge stereotypes and assumptions that can be made about individuals when delivering services.
 - 6.2.2. Specific Service Development sessions on Equality and Diversity to front line Area Services staff. The first session entitled “Knowing your service users and meeting their needs” focused on the customer profile of the local area. The second session “Our approach to equality and diversity: your contribution and role” focused on individual responsibilities. A key message from both sessions reinforced that equality and diversity is a routine part of everyone’s job and is primarily about providing good customer service and ensuring that everyone can access and use services.
 - 6.2.3. The “Focus on improving customer services” training was developed and delivered to over 500 craft operatives, taking account of the workplace culture, customer base and diversity awareness.
- 6.3. Formal training sessions have also been supplemented with a number of Core Brief articles on equality and diversity throughout the year including:
- ◆ Accessing Translation and Interpreting Services
 - ◆ Equality and Diversity Training opportunities and feedback
 - ◆ The role of the Housing and Technical Resources Diversity Liaison Officer
 - ◆ Dignity at Work Policy, including the appropriate use of language

7. Access to Information and Services

- 7.1. A number of new publications which provide information on key policies and services were published in 2009 and distributed to key locations including:-
 - ◆ “A short guide to our housing services” was published in 6 languages and provided an overview of key services and how to access them
 - ◆ “Domestic Abuse - How to get Help”
 - ◆ “Reporting Harassment and Hate Crime”
 - ◆ A series of leaflets on the new “Scheme of Assistance” provided information on private sector grant funding for home improvements and adaptations
- 7.2. In relation to physical access, Housing and Technical Resources public locations have a compliance rate of 100% with the Statutory Performance Indicator for Access. This includes 33% of services being provided in an alternative way (for example our Sheltered Housing Officers will visit residents at home as an alternative to calling at the office).
- 7.3. The Resource is also working with the South Lanarkshire Access Panel on a mystery shopping exercise to assess how well our services meet and respond to the needs of disabled people visiting our Q and A offices. The first 2 visits have been completed and have produced some very positive and constructive feedback.

8. Service Delivery

- 8.1. Mainstreaming equalities is a key focus of the Equality and Diversity Action Plan, in particular to ensure that services are accessible to all and provided in ways which meet the diverse needs of the community. Key areas of progress in 2009 include:-

- ◆ the implementation of a new Housing Allocation Policy which takes account of the full range of an individual's needs and seeks to address this in the prioritisation of applications and the provision of advice and information and the tenancy sign-up process
- ◆ the Resource worked as a key partner in protecting people who are vulnerable and at risk, including the development of Adult Protection procedures
- ◆ an information and advice strategy has been developed and delivered, which aims to provide accessible housing advice and information to meet a range of needs

8.2. A significant area of work for the Resource in 2009/10 was the preparation for, and support of, the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) inspection of its Housing Management, Homelessness and Landlord functions, including a focus on the following equality and diversity. A detailed submission document was prepared which outlined our approach to service provision and a self assessment of our performance. The Inspection Team were on site over a period of 4 weeks to undertake their investigations. The Resource is currently awaiting the formal inspection report which will identify if there are any issues identified which need to be addressed in relation to equalities.

8.3. Consultation and Participation

8.3.1. Housing and Technical Resources has well established arrangements for consulting and involving our tenants and service users to improve its understanding of their needs. Consultations undertaken in 2009/10 include:-

- ◆ Allocations Policy
- ◆ Repairs Policy
- ◆ Antisocial Behaviour Strategy
- ◆ Rent Arrears Policy
- ◆ Budgeting and Rent Setting
- ◆ Pitch Allocation Policy for Gypsies and Travellers Sites

8.4. Equipment and Adaptations

8.4.1. The Resource continues to offer equipment and adaptations to anyone who is assessed as being in need of them. 1,589 adaptations have been completed in 2009/10 in Council housing and 216 in Registered Social Landlord properties. 851 approvals for adaptations to private homes have also been given.

9. **Service Monitoring**

9.1. Service User Profile

9.1.1. A significant improvement made in 2009/10 is the production of a consolidated service user profile. The profile provides a breakdown of 3 key service areas namely; tenants, waiting list and homeless applicants in each local area by:-

- ◆ Age
- ◆ Gender
- ◆ Ethnicity
- ◆ Disability

The profile has been circulated widely across the Resource and formed the basis of a service development session for staff. This will shortly be updated for the financial year 2010/11 and will be used to monitor performance and identify trends in relation to access to services.

9.2. Customer Complaints

9.2.1. Complaints are monitored on a quarterly basis through the Customer Relationship Management System. Two complaints have been recorded under the "Equal Opportunities" category in 2009. One complaint, regarding access to staff toilets for a person with a disability, was upheld and further investigation and action taken. The other was a complaint regarding medical priority under the Allocation Policy. This complaint was re-classified from the "Equal Opportunities" category to the "Council policy" category and was not upheld.

9.3. Customer Feedback Framework

9.3.1. An independent consultant was appointed in 2009 to develop the customer feedback framework and improve feedback from individual service users. The Resource is currently considering ways to capture equalities monitoring information through the surveys.

9.3.2. The most recent exit and complaints satisfaction surveys undertaken by the Q and A service include the question "Do you feel you were treated fairly and sensitively?". These questions received a 100% and 97% satisfaction rate in the respective surveys in 2008/09.

10. **Performance Management and Reporting**

10.1. Housing and Technical Resources has a range of local and statutory performance indicators to monitor the delivery of services which are reported regularly to the Management Team.

10.2. Following re-assessment in March 2009, the Council's Q and A service retained its Customer Services Excellence Award.

10.3. Progress on the Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Action Plan is monitored on a bi-monthly basis by the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinating Group and reported to management every 6 months.

11. **Areas for Improvement and Priorities for the Year Ahead**

11.1. The Resource's Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11 has now been finalised. The Plan will continue to drive progress in relation to mainstreaming equalities and place a strong emphasis on access to services. Key actions include:-

- ◆ responding to the development of the new Single Equality Act
- ◆ ongoing development of the data monitoring and customer profiling exercise
- ◆ completion of the mystery shopping exercise with the Access Panel
- ◆ addressing any recommendations included in the SHR inspection report
- ◆ continuing to mainstream equalities into the review and development of policies and procedures, supported by consultation and impact assessment. Key policy areas scheduled for review in 2009/10 include:-

- ◆ Estate Management Policy
- ◆ Tenant Participation Strategy
- ◆ Repairs Procedures
- ◆ Local Housing Strategy

12. **Employee Implications**

12.1. None.

13. **Financial Implications**

13.1. None.

14. Other Implications

14.1. The risk to the Council is that if the Resource does not have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty it may lead to non-compliance with equalities legislation.

15. Equalities Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

15.1. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.

15.2. A variety of Council-wide and Resource specific forums e.g. tenants groups are consulted and actively participate in the wide range of public and employee consultation events organised by Corporate Resources when developing Race Equality and Disability Equality Schemes. The Resource also consults regularly with the South Lanarkshire Disability Partnership Housing Sub-Group regarding key areas of policy and service development.

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Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

12 May 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives/Improvement Themes/Values

- ◆ Fair and open
- ◆ People focused
- ◆ Working and respecting others
- ◆ Excellent employer
- ◆ Accountable, effective and efficient
- ◆ Tackling disadvantage and deprivation
- ◆ Sustainable development

Previous References

- ◆ Equal Opportunities Forum - 17 March 2009

List of Background Papers

Single Equality Scheme

Equality and Diversity Strategy

Contact for Further Information

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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