

Report

14

Report to:	Housing and Technical Resources Committee
Date of Meeting:	30 June 2010
Report by:	Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

Subject:	Annual Report on the Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2009/2010
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1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ provide an overview of the progress made against the Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2009/10.

2. Recommendation(s)

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

- (1) that the progress made, and priorities for 2010/11 in relation to mainstreaming equality and diversity be noted.

3. Background

- 3.1. The previous update report to Housing and Technical Resources Committee gave a commitment to provide a further update at the end of the financial year.
- 3.2. The Council's Single Equality Scheme and its strategy and policy on equality and diversity outline how we will meet our legislative duties and commitment to achieving equality and diversity in all of our activities.
- 3.3. The Resource has a well-established Equality and Diversity Co-ordinating Group with representation from each of the three service areas (Area, Property and Support) and the Joint Trades Unions. The group's primary role is to co-ordinate and monitor the Equality and Diversity Action Plan. The group also provides a strategic overview of equalities issues and supports a consistent approach to mainstreaming equality.
- 3.4. This report outlines the progress made in meeting these commitments and mainstreaming equality in 2009/10 and sets out the key priorities in 2010/11.

4. Key achievements in 2009/10

4.1. Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2009/10

- 4.1.1. The action plan sets out objectives and priority actions to help us to meet our legislative duties and mainstream equalities within the Resource. A wholesale review of this action plan was undertaken in early 2009, which resulted in a greater focus on impact and achieving outcomes.

4.1.2. Progress on the Plan is monitored by the Equality and Diversity Co-ordinating Group and reported to the Resource Management Team.

4.2. Staff Training and Development

4.2.1. The Resource continues to deliver a major training programme in relation to Equality and Diversity. A total of 2,113 members of H&TR 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

4.2.2. Other notable training events include:

- ◆ Forum Interactive World Café training, specifically designed for Housing Services and delivered to 700 employees from Area, Property and Support Services, with the aim of challenging stereotypes and assumptions about individuals.
- ◆ 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 aimed to provide practical advice to staff. The sessions received positive feedback from staff.
- ◆ Over 500 craft operatives received 'Focus on improving customer services' training which was developed to provide diversity awareness and take account of the workplace culture and customer base.

4.2.3. 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 H&TR Diversity Liaison Officer;
- ◆ Dignity at Work Policy, including the appropriate use of language.

4.3. Access to Information and Services

4.3.1. Publications

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', published in 6 languages, provides an overview of key services and how to access them;
- ◆ 'Domestic Abuse - How to get Help';
- ◆ 'Reporting Harassment and Hate Crime';
- ◆ 'Scheme of Assistance' funding for home improvements and adaptations.

4.3.2. 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 provided in an alternative way (for example our Sheltered Housing Officers can visit residents at home as an alternative to call at the office).

4.3.3. Mystery shopping exercise with the South Lanarkshire Access Panel

The Resource has worked in partnership with the Panel to develop 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 two visits were undertaken at East Kilbride and Carluke in February 2010 by a member of the Panel trained and experienced in access audits and mystery shopping.

The feedback from the first two visits is very positive, particularly in relation to the helpfulness of staff and the physical access inside the Q and A offices.

A small number of issues were also identified in the exercise relating to car parking arrangements and signage; a high reception desk at Carluke and the disabled toilet facility at East Kilbride. Options to address these issues are currently being considered and will be progressed via the relevant service improvement plans.

A schedule of further visits will be programmed in 2010 and a full evaluation report prepared.

4.4. Improvements in data collection and monitoring arrangements

4.4.1. Service User Profile

A significant improvement made in 2009/10 is the production of a consolidated service user profile. The profile provides a breakdown of three key service areas in namely: Tenants, Waiting List and Homeless Applications 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 2009/10 and will help to monitor performance and identify trends in relation to access to services.

4.4.2. Data Collection and Monitoring

The Resource recognised through its service planning processes that better monitoring and customer profiling information is required to help plan and provide services which meet the needs of individuals and make more effective use of resources. Consequently, a short life working group has been set up to undertake a review. The group has made progress in relation to identifying gaps in customer information and initial investigations into the capacity of existing IT systems to support this area of work. The work that has been carried out to date will enable the Resource to progress actions in the current financial year to improve communication with service users who have particular needs.

4.5. Equality Impact Assessments

4.5.1. All new and revised policies and functions are subject to an equality and human rights impact assessment (EQIA). In 2009/10 58 impact assessments were completed, 55 published (the remaining three 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.

4.5.2. Resource guidance has been delayed by the review of the EQIA online system. An interim briefing note will be issued to supplement the existing Corporate Guidance and fuller guidance developed when the review is complete.

4.6. Consultation and Participation

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

- ◆ Allocations Policy
- ◆ Repairs Policy
- ◆ Antisocial Behaviour Strategy
- ◆ Rent Arrears Policy
- ◆ Budgeting and Rent Setting

4.6.2. There are a number of areas of consultation and involvement which we have sought to improve, particularly in relation to harder to reach groups. This includes two well attended focus groups with residents of the Council's Gypsies/Travellers sites in Swinhill, Larkhall and Springbank, East Kilbride. These events:-

- ◆ Sought views on the new Pitch Allocation Policy and Occupancy Agreement;
- ◆ Provided an update on site investment works and the opportunity for residents to raise questions and issues;
- ◆ Involved Social Work and helped to raise awareness of the Council's Occupational Therapy Services;
- ◆ Discussed and encouraged ongoing involvement and engagement with residents and led to some residents attending the Budget and Rent Setting Consultation event in October.

The views expressed by residents at the events were built into the new site allocation policy and occupancy agreement which is now in place. Given the support expression at the focus groups for similar events to be staged in the future it has been agreed that an Annual Focus Group will be held to enable residents of both sites to express their views on the service.

4.7. Scottish Housing Regulator Inspection

4.7.1. A significant area of work for the Resource in 2009/10 was the inspection of its Housing Management, Homelessness and Landlord functions by the Scottish Housing Regulator. Equality and Diversity was a key aspect of the inspection. The submission document prepared set out our approach and the outcomes in relation to equality. The Resource is currently awaiting the formal inspection report which will identify if there are any equalities issues which need to be addressed.

5. **Next steps and priorities for 2010/11**

5.1. The Resource Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2010/11 has recently been developed and will continue to drive progress in relation to mainstreaming equality and place emphasis on access to services. Key areas for action in 2010/11 include:-

- ◆ Improving engagement with tenants from a minority ethnic background. Work has commenced with the South Lanarkshire Tenant Development Support Project to develop a consultation event to increase our understanding of this group's needs and experiences in relation to our services and to encourage ongoing participation in our tenant participation structures.

- ◆ Continuing work to further improve data collection and monitoring systems which will enable us to:-
 - ◆ Enhance our ability to profile the needs of service users;
 - ◆ Record and identify different needs on our main housing and homelessness systems;
 - ◆ Establish systems to communicate with applicants in a way which meets their needs, for example large print.
- ◆ A continued focus on customer needs and ensuring that services are accessible to everyone, including the roll-out of the mystery shopping exercise with the Access Panel to the remaining Q and A offices;
- ◆ Addressing any recommendations emanating from 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
- ◆ Responding to and taking account of the new legislative duties relating to the Single Equality Act.

5.2. Progress in relation to mainstreaming equality will continue to be monitored by the Co-ordinating Group and reported to the Resource Management Team. Given the progress made in 2009/10, it is proposed to report to Committee annually on the Equality and Diversity Action Plan.

6. Employee Implications

6.1. None.

7. Financial Implications

7.1. None.

8. Other Implications

8.1. There are no implications for sustainability or risk in terms of the information contained within this report.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements

9.1. 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 or consultation is required.

Lindsay Freeland
Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)

28 May 2010

Link(s) to Council Objectives and Values

- ◆ Improve the quality, access and availability of housing

Previous References

- ◆ Housing and Technical Resources Committee, 25 November 2009

List of Background Papers

- ◆ Housing and Technical Resources Equality and Diversity Action Plan 2009/10

Contact for Further Information

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

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