

**BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**CYNGOR BWRDEISTREF SIROL PEN-Y-BONT AR OGWR**

**REPORT TO CABINET EQUALITIES COMMITTEE**

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE – CORPORATE  
DEVELOPMENT & PARTNERSHIPS**

**6<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2008**

**REPORT ON EQUALITY REVIEW AND PROPOSAL ON CORPORATE  
EQUALITY SCHEME**

**1. Purpose of report: -**

- 1.1 To up-date the Cabinet Equalities Committee on the Authority's progress towards attaining *'improving authority'* status under the WLGA Equality Improvement Framework.

**2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority: -**

- 2.2 The information set out in this report identifies the action being taken to mitigate the risk of failure to meet the Council's statutory duties in respect of equalities. As equalities is a cross-cutting issue this information will support all of the Council's corporate priorities.

**3. Background:-**

- 3.1 The Authority recognised in its Corporate Improvement Plan that there was a risk of failure to meet its statutory equality duties. To mitigate this risk the authority made a commitment to attain *'improving authority'* status under the new *Equality Improvement Framework for Welsh Local Government* (EIF). The EIF establishes a framework for self-assessment and improvement on equality and sits within the *Wales Programme for Improvement*.

- 3.2 In June 2008 an independent review of the Authority's existing equality and diversity policies and practices was carried out. The review contributes to satisfying Part 1 of the EIF self-assessment process covering Corporate Governance of Equality (Values, Vision, Leadership and Management).

**4. Current situation / proposal :-**

- 4.1 The review has helped to:
- identify risk areas in terms of legislative compliance;
  - identify priorities to secure compliance; and

- identify areas of good practice.

4.2 The key risks and recommendations of the review were reported to the Corporate Equalities Management Group in July 2008 and are summarised below:

- **Compliance with the public sector equality duties** - The Authority's existing schemes and action plans need to be reviewed and up-dated to ensure compliance on statutory requirements on data collection and disaggregation, training, and positive promotion strategies.
- **Equal Pay** – All efforts should be made to complete the current review.
- **Welsh Language Scheme** – There needs to be evidence of implementation and compliance with the Authority's new scheme.
- **Vision and Leadership** – Evidence of a high level of commitment to equality needs to be captured in clear corporate messages with better awareness to ensure that equality informs service delivery.
- **Accountability and responsibility** - Clearer methods for accounting on equality outcomes need to be developed by the Authority, including more effective use of the Corporate Equality Management Group (CEMG) and the Cabinet Equalities Committee. Good practice should be captured as case studies to promote corporate learning.
- **Knowledge and Understanding** - Knowledge and understanding appeared patchy and was often driven by personal or service experiences. There was varying levels of knowledge about the different equality strands and this was largely based around the anti-discrimination legislation. A new corporate approach should aim to promote understanding of the new 'positive' equality duties.
- **Training** – There was a call for training and development on equality across the Directorates. This included induction, awareness raising on the equality duties, and tailored training for service areas. Schools are covered by specific equality duties and subject to different service demands that will also need to be addressed. It was also noted that the Authority needs to build capacity to conduct equality impact assessments.

4.3 In early September the Corporate Equalities Management Group considered the review's findings and recommendations and agreed the following actions in response:

- To develop a clear vision statement linked to the council's new values (FACE) and customer service charter - headlining fairness;
- To complete the development of the authority's draft corporate equality scheme, ensuring that it meets all of the statutory requirements of the equality duties;
- To include in the Corporate Equality Scheme a clear statement on responsibilities covering the roles of Members, officers, schools, public sector partners and contractors.

- To develop a training programme to support the delivery of the customer service charter targeting management and front-line staff, including schools;
- To review current data collection in services and in the workforce and identify how equality disaggregated data (including data on gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief) can be used to inform priorities and ensure compliance;
- To collect case studies from services giving practical examples of existing practice in meeting the needs of our customers and satisfying the equality duties;
- To clarify mechanisms for accounting on equality outcomes through the existing structures and finalise the authority's approach to carrying out equality impact assessments following the initial pilot.

4.4 The Group considered that the issues raised around bilingual service provision will be addressed through the authority's new revised Welsh Language Scheme.

4.5 A subsequent meeting with the WLGA Director of Social Justice and Equalities provided an opportunity to discuss these issues in the context of the *Equality Improvement Framework*. The meeting was very positive and also drew attention to national policy developments that the Authority need to be mindful of in formulating its new equality scheme:

- Developing the links between the *Equality Improvement Framework* and the *Wales Programme of Improvement* to focus on risk assessment and equality outcomes;
- Gathering and using equality disaggregated data (including data on gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief) on customers and staff to support achievement of our corporate objectives;
- Developing training that enables Members and staff to become proactive in promoting equality in their roles within the community;
- The Assembly Government work-streams on:
  - Tackling age discrimination in the workplace and the wider community;
  - Tackling domestic abuse as a key gender equality issue;
  - Promoting community cohesion including the All Wales Community Cohesion Project; guidance around Gypsy Traveller issues; the national Refugee Inclusion Strategy; and initiatives around the impact of recent migration on services and community relations.

4.6 The actions agreed by the Corporate Equalities Management Group will be undertaken in the first phase of developing the Authority's the Corporate Equality Scheme and has informed the draft contents list set out in **Appendix 1**. The aim is to publish the scheme by April 2009.

**5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules:-**

- 5.1 The report has no direct effect upon the policy framework or procedure rules but does support the effective implementation of the Council's statutory duties in relation to equalities and human rights.

**6. Legal Implications :-**

- 6.1 Failure to comply with statutory provisions of equality and human rights legislation would leave the Authority vulnerable to enforcement action and litigation.

**7. Financial Implications :-**

- 7.1 Failure to effectively manage equality and human rights issues may result in the Authority incurring unnecessary corporate costs and help to mitigate any potential legal claims.

**8. Recommendation: -**

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Equalities Committee considers the issues set out in this report and approves the contents list set out in Appendix 1 as the basis of the draft Corporate Equality Scheme.

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**6<sup>th</sup> October 2008**

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**10. Background documents:-**

- Bridgend County Borough Council Review on Equalities policy, process and practice Review.
- The WLGA Equality Improvement Framework for Welsh Local Government.
- The Wales Programme of Improvement Guidance for Local Authorities 2005 (Circular 28/2005).

**Draft Corporate Equality Scheme Contents List**

<b>Section 1</b>	Our equality statement – based on FAIR ( <i>Fair, Accessible, Inclusive and Respectful</i> ) and confirming our commitment to the social model of disability;
<b>Section 2</b>	Our individual and collective responsibilities – setting out the equality duties and our responsibilities as elected members and officers; in schools; with our public sector partners and our contractors; and including the specific role of the Cabinet Equalities Committee and the Corporate Equalities Management Group;
<b>Section 3</b>	Our community and our workforce – setting out key statistics about our local population and workforce relating to equality issues;
<b>Section 4</b>	How we have involved people – setting out specific consultation activities carried out in developing the scheme;
<b>Section 5</b>	Our arrangements for training – setting out how we will build knowledge and understanding among elected members, officers and in schools about our duties and meeting customer and staff equality needs;
<b>Section 6</b>	Our arrangements for monitoring impact – setting out our approach to equality impact assessments;
<b>Section 7</b>	Our equality action plans – setting out our corporate actions for achieving equality outcomes by equality mandate and duty (covering gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion and belief); – setting out Directorate specific actions for achieving equality outcomes;
<b>Section 8</b>	Our arrangements for monitoring and reviewing progress - setting out how we will manage our performance on our duties and progress towards our equality outcomes in line with the Equality Improvement Framework, including publication of an annual assessment report.