

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr G Blackwell

LEAD OFFICER: Martin Jepson

REPORT AUTHOR: Martin Jepson

Summary: Requests approval for the acquisition of Equality and Diversity training for staff and members.

Recommendation:

1. That the training packages as described in the report be acquired.
2. That £10,000 be used from contingencies to help fund the training packages.

Impact on delivering the Corporate Plan: As part of its commitment on Social Inclusion the Council is committed to achieving Level 1 of the Equality Standard in Local Government by March 2006. To achieve Level 1, it is necessary to show staff and member awareness of, and commitment to, Equality and Diversity issues. The acquisition of training packages as described in the report will help to achieve this and is a key action shown as priority 8 in Quality of Life and Social Inclusion.

Impact on other statutory objectives (e.g. crime & disorder, LA21): Councils have a positive duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act to promote good race relations.

Sex discrimination is unlawful.

The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 makes it a positive duty on Councils to promote the interests of the disabled.

By October 2006, the Government are likely to have carried out their commitment to make "age – ism" in the workplace unlawful.

A learning and training package on Equality and Diversity is the first step towards obtaining Level 1 of the Equality Standard in Local Government, which will include the writing of an Action Plan to cover various statutory requirements.

Financial and human resource implications: The cost of a suitable training package is up to £15,000. No funds have been set aside in this years budget for training. If approved, funding could be found from the training budget (£5,000) with the balance (£10,000) to be funded from contingencies. The current balance on contingencies is £212,077 prior to any approvals on this Agenda. A software training package is likely to involve a commitment of staff taking it of approximately six hours work time, at times when it is convenient for them to do so. A number of half day face to face training sessions are also planned for selected staff and members. A working group of officers also meets regularly to help move the Equality and Diversity project forward.

Project & Risk Management:

The Equality and Diversity project is a project which is reported to the Improvement Board. The Project Plan has recently been updated. Failure to carry out training as described will almost certainly be fatal to the Council's wishes to obtain Level 1 of the Equality Standard.

Key Decision Status

- **Financial:** No
- **Ward:** No

Other Ward Implications: None directly arising from this report. However, actions arising from the greater awareness's of the Council about such issues is likely to be of benefit to large sections of the population of Copeland.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Best Value Performance Indicator 2(A) asks Councils to rate themselves on the level they are at in relation to the Equality Standard in Local Government. There are five progressively higher levels, the lowest being level 1 and the highest being level 5.

This Council is committed to obtaining level1 by March 2006.

1.2 Many Councils have not yet reached level 1. The majority of Councils who have obtained a level are at level 1. We believe that only one Council in the country has reached level 5.

1.3 Although this Council has always taken Equality and Diversity issues seriously, it has previously taken the view that other priorities should take precedence. However, in the light of the last CPA report, of subsequent comments by the Audit Commission and of the publication of the terms of reference for the next round of CPA, which will place Equality and Diversity as one of three main cross-cutting themes, it will no longer be possible to give it a low priority in the future.

2. PROGRESS SO FAR

2.1 An Officers' Equality and Diversity Project Group has been set up and a Project Plan produced. The group sees it as essential to obtaining Level 1 that a training programme be developed.

2.2 A survey of progress in departments has been carried out. Although awareness of Equality and Diversity issues is good in pockets of the Council, it is clear that more work on awareness training needs to be carried out.

2.3 A draft Equality Policy has been roughed out. However, what is missing so far is an Action Plan. We believe this Action Plan can only be effective if the initiatives in it are put forward and developed by the individual departments. This can only be done once we have developed their awareness of and commitment to such issues through training.

2.4 County-wide and West Cumbrian initiatives are also being developed. Through the County-wide group a County-wide BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) survey has been developed. The results of that survey were published on 30th June. That survey provided opinions of the BME Community County-wide and district wide. We shall be analyzing that information as part of the project and making recommendations for change where appropriate.

3. SUGGESTED TRAINING

- 3.1 The Project Group has looked at various training packages. The training which it recommends for the majority of its staff and members is a software training package, which was taken up by Allerdale Council last year. The company providing it is LRI (Learning Resources International).
- 3.2 The package covers six areas:- Race, Age, Disability, Gender, Religion and belief and Sexual Orientation. Each participant in the training will be asked to complete the learning part of each area and then pass a multi-choice test. Staff and members would be able to carry out the training at times which suited them. It is expected the training would take in the region of six hours in total, to be completed within twelve months. The likely cost of this training is shown in a separate Part 2 report. We believe that up to 250 staff and members could be accommodated in this way.
- 3.3 The Group recommended that in addition to the software learning package, it would be of value to hold face to face training sessions with those staff who do not have daily access to computers at work. These staff are for the most part located in Leisure and Environmental Services. Some Members still do not have access to computers and may also prefer to opt for face to face training. The likely cost of this face to face training, which we recommend to be done through Cumbria County Council's training provider, is shown in the Part 2 addendum to this report.
- 3.4 Finally, the Project Group saw the need for more specialist face to face training, in terms of development of the Council's Equality Standards initiatives, for the Group itself, members of Corporate Team and for key members of the Executive. The likely cost of this is shown in the Part 2 addendum.
- 3.5 The Administrator of the software package is able to monitor the progress of each person through the training. The Project group needs to devise a method for monitoring the effectiveness of the training, this being a key part of the evidence required to achieve Level 1.
- 3.6 Budget bids would be made in subsequent years for ongoing training. This is likely to be for new starters.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 We believe that a training initiative as described is vital to invigorate the Council's work on Equality and Diversity and the wider issue of Social Inclusion.

List of Appendices

Nil

List of Background Documents:

Equality and Diversity Project Group: Project Plan: Working Papers.

Cumbria Diversity Group: Agendas and Minutes.

West Cumbria Diversity Group: Agenda and Notes

List of Consultees:

Chief Executive

Head of Finance and Business Development

(Cllr G Blackwell)

(Cllr E Woodburn)