



## EQUALITIES PANEL

### ROLE OF THE PANEL IN MOVING FORWARD THE COUNCIL'S EQUALITIES AGENDA

#### Background

For the last 18 months, the Council has been engaged in raising the profile of equalities at all levels and in all departments. There have been a variety of activities including training and briefing sessions, diversity days, regular articles in City Scene and City Briefing, high profile projects such as the Stonewall ranking and Pink Pamphlet, establishment of staff groups for BME staff, LGBT staff and most recently disabled staff, and the introduction of Equality Impact Assessments.

Whilst progress had been made, the activities have also served to challenge and inform current practice and organisational culture. They have also brought with them some hostile responses from individual members of staff, and from others there has been a noticeable lack of response, ignorance or even prejudice about equalities and diversity.

The cultural climate of the organisation will have to change if the Council is to achieve its equalities objectives and meet its legal obligations. This will also be essential to the success of the Customer Access Strategy, improvements in customer care, and continuation of achievement within the Equality Standard.

This paper looks at the work that is planned over the next year by Council staff and asks the Panel to consider how it might play a role in moving this equalities agenda forward.

#### Work that is currently planned

The Council's Joint Equalities Group (made up of representatives from Human Resources, Community Development and Strategy & Partnerships) has compiled an outline of activities and objectives for 2005-2006 that continue to progress the Council's equalities agenda.

The work programme consists of:

- An annual programme of diversity days to support the specific duty to promote good relations, for all equality areas

Holocaust Memorial Day	27 <sup>th</sup> January
LGBT History Month	February

International Women's Day	8 <sup>th</sup> March
International Day to Eliminate Racism	21 <sup>st</sup> March
Black History Month	October
International Day of Older People	1 <sup>st</sup> October
International Day of Disabled People	3 <sup>rd</sup> December
International Human Rights Day	10 <sup>th</sup> December
plus	
Local Democracy Day (during Local Democracy Week)	20th October
National Play Day	August

- Strengthening, capacity building and enabling the council's equalities support structures (Equalities Panel, Equalities Champion & CMT, Equalities Link Officers, Joint Equalities Group, Members and managers)
- Capacity building community organisations involved in partnership working on equalities issues
- Targeted training on equalities issues for staff and Members
- Establishing, facilitating and supporting minority staff support groups, and providing mechanisms for feedback into the Council's structures
- Developing local and regional networks, and further partnership working
- Affecting organisational cultural change
- Equalities policy development and harmonisation
- Equality impact assessing policies and functions, in relation to the Council's Race Equality Scheme and Equality Standard for Local Government

### **Role of the Equalities Panel in this work**

The Equalities Panel membership consists of the general public, Council staff and councillors. It embodies a welcome and diverse range of perspectives, skills and expertise and has an important role to play in 'championing' equalities within Cambridge City Council.

The Council needs to be giving a clear message internally and externally about where it stands on equalities – that it is against all forms of discrimination, that it is working positively to meet its duty to promote good relations between different groups, that it welcomes and celebrates diversity, and that it aspires to being an anti-discriminatory organisation.

**The Panel needs to consider what role it wants to play in moving this agenda forward. Panel members also need to consider what training and**

**support they might need to help them fulfil the roles to which the Panel aspires.**

In order to develop this role the Panel may need to:

- identify current skills, knowledge and expertise of its members
- identify and address any gaps in knowledge of diversity and equalities issues
- address any differences of opinion between Panel members on equalities and diversity issues
- look at the capacity of the Panel, collectively and individually, to take on specific areas of work within the equalities agenda
- consider the role of the Panel in being a high profile promoter of cultural change within the organisation and supporter of the change process
- consider the role of the Panel, collectively and individually, in challenging any resistance or hostile reactions to the Council's equalities work

### **Recommendations**

That a training needs audit is conducted to help Panel members identify their individual and collective training and support needs

That the panel hold a separate session in July to discuss how it wishes its future role to develop and to identify future training and support needs – the results of the audit could be collated to inform discussion at that session.