

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL MEETING

WEDNESDAY 15th November 2006

Disability Equality Scheme – 2006-2009
Consultation Feedback

OPEN	
COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME	Greater Learning and Participation
CORPORATE PLAN THEME:	Developing Quality Services Developing People and the Workplace
KEY PRIORITY:	Equity and Equal opportunities
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr John Paul Campion
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	Chief Executive
CONTACT OFFICER:	Walter Delin
APPENDICES	None

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report feed back from Promoting Disability Equality Event “Countdown to Disability Equality in Wyre Forest” held at the Earl Baldwin Suite Duke House Kidderminster on Tuesday 31st October 2006

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Council is asked to **DECIDE** that:

- 2.2 The Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan, as detailed in the report to the Cabinet on 28th September 2006, be approved and published on the Council’s website subject to the incorporation of appropriate points arising from consultation.
- 2.3 An Equality and Diversity Officer be appointed to ensure the development and implementation of the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.
- 2.4 The post be either for a two year fixed term, or permanent, and be funded in the current year from existing budgets and future funding be included as part of the 2007/08 budget process.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (‘the Act’), requires Public Bodies such as the Council to produce a Disability Equality Scheme. The Disability Equality Duty (DED) will come into force

on 5th December 2006. The Cabinet at its meeting on 28th September 2006 endorsed the Scheme for consultation prior to its adoption by the Council.

- 3.2 On 31st October 2006 we held a Disability Equality Duty consultation event at the Earl Baldwin Suite Duke House Kidderminster and invited key representatives of 53 local charities and user groups. 23 persons attended. The event was facilitated by members of the Equality and Diversity Working Group and other council employees
- 3.3 The Chief Executive opened the event as host, and background information was provided. The introduction included an update on DDA legislation, what a Disability Equality Scheme is, why we are introducing one, what it will be used for and who it is intended to help.
- 3.4 The venue was organised “workshop style”, with tables for contributors to sit and discuss in small groups. Each table was supported by a facilitator and note taker and was arranged to include a good mix of organisations to aid balanced discussion.
- 3.5 Groups concentrated on exploring issues and discussing problems faced by disabled people and considering possible solutions to these as well as identifying examples of existing good practice that could be shared. The following themes were discussed:

- Attitudes
- Transport and parking
- Access to public buildings
- Information and communication
- Policies and procedures
- Employment
- Disability Equality Scheme
- Action Planning
- Good practice
- Feedback on the event itself

- 3.6 The event was a great success and a summary of the responses is in progress and will be sent to members once it is available. West Mercia Police have written to say:

“First of all may I offer my congratulations on the success of the Disability Equality Scheme consultation evening. I was heartened to hear a number of voluntary sector Representatives State how pleased they were that the Council was taking their concerns and opinions on board. Having worked on a similar team creating a joint scheme to serve the four midland police forces, I can fully appreciate the task that your team has in developing the comments and actions raised.”

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Next steps will be for the Council to thoroughly review the responses in order to identify any-specific issues and those where further joint working may be possible and how the feedback will be incorporated into our Disability Equality Scheme and

associated action plans. We intend to hold a similar event next year to review the schemes once they have been developed and to gain input from stakeholders about their progress.

4.3 There is a specific duty on the Council to publish the Scheme widely and ensure that it is implemented. It would be valuable, therefore, for an Equality and Diversity Officer to be appointed for the implementation of the duty and the scheme. Having someone with disability expertise to advise and co-ordinate would be beneficial. In addition this Officer's main role would be:

- *To ensure the Council meets its statutory obligations and corporate requirements. This would include achieving the appropriate target level set for the Equality Standard for Local Government BV2a and the Duty to Promote Race Equality BV2b.*
- *To promote and embed Equality and Diversity across service areas and in service delivery.*
- *To recommend and implement maxims that help the Council engage with all sections of the local population regardless of age, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or disability.*

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The resources required for the appointment of an Equality and Diversity Officer on Scale I (£25, 000-£28;000), subject to job evaluation, and on-costs (£10,000) will be met in the current year from existing budgets. Subsequent funding will be identified as part of the 2007/08 budget process.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Scheme will support compliance with Act and enable the Council to progress towards achieving its key priorities of equity and equal opportunities.

6.2 The Scheme aids the continuous improvement in service delivery to disabled citizens and improves the council engagement with groups of disabled people in the district. It will also link into the customer service strategy.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

7.2 If Council does not comply with its specific duties it could face enforcement action by the Disability Rights Commission. Unlawful discrimination under the Act can lead to civil proceedings in the County Court or, in the case of employment issues, the employment tribunal.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This Disability Equality Scheme will help us to meet the requirements of the Act and set our plans to improve disability access to employment and services.

8.2 The Council needs to appoint a dedicated Diversity and Equality Officer to ensure that we fully comply with our statutory and community duties across the six strands of discrimination.

9. CONSULTEES

9.1 CMT

9.2 Equality and Diversity Working Group

9.3 Equality and Diversity Champion

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None