

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

FROM: Deputy Chief Executive

REPORT NUMBER: **K101**

TO: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
(STEWARDSHIP) COMMITTEE

DATE OF MEETING: 21 September 2010

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE FAIRNESS AND EQUAL ACCESS GROUP

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the committee on:

- The progress made by the Fairness and Equal Access Group (FEAG) in responding to the features and challenges of the new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).
- The key outputs and outcomes delivered under each of the five themes of the EFLG, and to provide an overview of the approach to be taken in 2010/11.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 That the progress made by the Fairness and Equal Access Group in 2009/10 as set out in the report be noted.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 No additional financial resources are sought for the work set out in this paper.

4. **RISK MANAGEMENT**

4.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Significant Business Risks No.6 (Culture and Change Management) and No.10 (Local Response to National Issues). Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
The Council is unable to meet the duties placed upon it under various equalities legislation	Low	Critical	Fully compliant statutory Equality Scheme

Risk Description	Likelihood	Seriousness or Impact	Mitigation Measures
Failure to understand and meet the needs of different service users (including vulnerable persons) and communities within the district	Significant	Critical	The actions and outcomes set out in this report
Failure to progress towards the “achieving” level of the new Equality Framework for Local Government will adversely impact on future external assessments of Babergh’s performance – and consequently on the Council’s reputation	Significant	Marginal	A programme of work developed and managed by the Fairness and Equal Access Group

5. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPACT**

This report sets out the Council's corporate approach to managing equality and diversity and the progress that has been made towards improved outcomes for all our diverse communities. It sets out the actions that have been taken in 2009/10 to produce positive impacts across the six equality strands (age, gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, faith or belief). Many of these actions have themselves been identified through the equality impact assessment process.

6. **KEY INFORMATION**

6.1 The Fairness and Equal Access Group (FEAG) was established in May 2009 in response to the new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) which came into effect on 1 April 2009. The new framework provided officers with an opportunity to refresh the Council’s existing approach to equality and diversity, which had tended to focus on compliance with the public duties on race, disability and gender, and reposition it in the broader context of fairness and equal access to Council services.

6.2 The aims of FEAG are:

- To ensure all of Babergh’s communities have fair and equal access to quality services.
- To support the development of a modern and diverse workforce.
- To obtain the ‘achieving’ level of the new EFLG

- 6.3 The group is chaired by the deputy Chief Executive with leadership and delivery of each of the five themed areas of the EFLG provided by the most appropriate group member. Membership includes Councillor David Wood in his capacity as Member Champion on Equalities, a Head of Service (who acts as deputy Chair), a representative from Unison and officer representation from all of the six divisions.
- 6.4 Good progress is being made towards obtaining the 'achieving' level of the framework, but the achievement of this award is not the sole focus of the group. Indeed, the primary focus of the group in 2010 and for 2011 will be to develop and deliver actions which will produce positive outcomes and benefits for our communities. Once these actions have been delivered the group will then assess whether Babergh should formally seek the award, from the Improvement and Development Agency (part of the LGA group), of the 'achieving' level.
- 6.5 **SUMMARY OF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2009/10 FOR EACH OF THE FIVE THEMES**

Theme 1 – Knowing Your Community and Equality Mapping

In 2009/10 the Council has:-

- Contributed funding and officer resource to the development of a new Local Information System for Suffolk which, when operational, will provide staff and Members with access to the widest possible range of information and analysis on the communities that make-up Babergh including detailed Ward Profiles.
- Produced a detailed Community Profile for the Babergh East Local Strategic Partnership which informed the evidence base for their new Community Plan 2010-2020.
- Developed an equality profile of the Babergh workforce based on HR data.
- Supported the first ever public consultation undertaken in Suffolk on the views, experiences and needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and their families.
- Using the Suffolk Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) as a starting point, examined the future impact of an ageing population, increasing ethnic diversity and rural deprivation on the Babergh district.
- Completed an equality mapping exercise in housing using monitoring data for all applicants within the new sub-regional Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme. This approach was used to examine any equality variances between applicants on the register / applicants housed and the local population. The findings were used to inform a full Equality Impact Assessment and the development of a Vulnerable Persons strategy. This robust approach continues to ensure that Council properties are let in a fair and transparent way whilst increasing choice and housing options for customers.

- Supported the Positive Impacts conference coordinated by ISCRE and the Migrant Profile Research project funded by the Migration Impacts Fund grant and coordinated by the County Council

Theme 2 – Place Shaping, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment

In 2009/10 the Council has:-

- Raised the profile of the equalities agenda within the Council and secured partnership commitment from both the Local Strategic Partnerships

Case Study 1 – Pin Mill

Pin Mill is a small hamlet on the north side of the Shotley peninsula fronting on the River Orwell. Historically the hamlet has focused on maritime activity. The Hard, which is a landing area projecting to the low water mark, has been the centre of maritime activities such as boat building and repairs, yachting, mooring and access to Pin Mill itself.

Some years ago the Council set up the Pin Mill Task Group to bring the diverse community together to try and regenerate the area through improving the maritime facilities, and hence the local economy. The task group was made up of all the 'stakeholders' involved with the Pin Mill including local Elected Members of the Council, the Parish Council, the Pin Mill Sailing Club, the National Trust, the Environment Agency, Associated British Ports, The Pin Mill Society and the local houseboat owners. In addition local boatyard owners, moorings operators and Ipswich Borough Council have also been involved at various stages.

The task group's earlier achievements included the removal of wrecks, improved refuse collection arrangements, the introduction of a planning enforcement regime and 'clean-up' days organised with the National Trust and the Environment Agency.

A recent project has involved putting together a scheme which will see the restoration of a historic maritime working environment and improving tourism viability. Works will be carried out to The Hard which will see a launching and landing facility being fully refurbished. A new barge repair facility will also be erected prompting the possible return of the Thames sailing barges to Pin Mill. The project was developed in response to local need with recognition of the potentially conflicting stakeholder requirements

The Council's role in leading the Pin Mill regeneration project is an example of place shaping and enabling diverse communities to work together to bring increased economic activity and sustainable growth to an area. It was developed in response to local needs recognising the potential for conflicting stakeholder requirements. The Council acted as catalyst for its development whilst leveraging external funding to support diverse community needs.

- Revised the Council's Equalities Policy and developed a clear statement on the website committing to improving equality outcomes
- Ensured that it has a fully compliant Single Equality Scheme in place which is coterminous with the Council's Medium Term Plans and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- Embedded Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) into the organisation by enhancing the existing process to ensure that assessments are undertaken by the relevant officer at the developmental stage of any new policy/service/project or programme and that all service managers are trained, or supported by, trained staff.
- Ensured that all committee reports and significant budget decisions fully address equality and diversity issues.
- Delivered a new programme of equality training for Members which was well-received with high levels of participation.

Theme 3 – Community Engagement and Satisfaction

In 2009/10 the Council has:-

- Improved participation of under-represented groups by establishing an Equality Panel (see case study 3)
- Developed a programme designed to mark and, wherever possible, directly support a wide range of dates and events in the annual Equalities calendar.
- Delivered a Gypsy and Traveller awareness event for Members and staff. The event increased knowledge and understanding of this minority group, helping to dispel commonly held myths and highlight potential issues around future provision of sites in the district.

Case Study 2 – The Shotley Youth News Crew (SYNC)

In May 2009, Babergh District Council organised and funded a film project for a group of young people from Shotley. The project aimed to challenge negative perceptions of teenagers in their community and provide a creative outlet for their energy.

The film was presented as a news bulletin to a wide audience in the village. It showed the young people interviewing different members of their community to find out their views of young people living in Shotley.

One of the key findings from the film was the lack of facilities for young people in the village.

The project went from strength to strength and attracted a total of £41,810 funding for a new youth club (a modular building) in the grounds of Shotley village Hall. Subject to planning permission being granted, the young people will be digging out the footings, painting and decorating the new building. It is hoped that this part of the project will attract more volunteers from the community as a whole to help with this work.

The membership of SYNC has grown from the original nine to fifty.

This project is an example of Babergh supporting a group of young people and enabling them to work towards securing funding to keep themselves and others off the streets.

Theme 4 – Responsive Services and Customer Care

In 2009/10 the Council has:-

- Trained all Service Managers to recognise and understand Equality and Diversity monitoring data and to undertake Equality Impact Assessments. The next step will be for service managers to begin equality mapping of those persons who have taken up their services. This information will then be used to deliver improvements to the way the services are offered to attract applicants from under represented groups and individuals.
- Carried out stage 1 Equality Impact Assessments (screenings) for all relevant service areas and Managers recognise that when a new service or substantial change to a current service is imminent an Equality Impact Assessment needs to be carried out and the findings acted upon.

Case Study 3 – Equality Panel

What really matters, regardless of the Government's requirements and the wish to improve our formal equalities rating, what lies at the heart of the diversity agenda, is a genuine desire to ensure that the services Babergh provides meet the needs of all our customers regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, faith or degree of disability.

We can only do this if we understand the needs of all these groups; which may or may not be the same as the other groups we serve. To this end an `Equality Panel` has been established. This Panel is made up of people who have agreed to respond to our requests for their thoughts on our services. Anyone can join the Panel but we are deliberately targeting our recruitment at events likely to attract underrepresented groups. This will be an on-going commitment but we have already got nearly 100 people on the Panel representing a wide range of local communities.

This informal group have volunteered to act as a sounding board for Babergh; enabling us to get an external view of our new plans and to help us review existing ones. This will help ensure that everyone in the Babergh District has fair and equal access to public services.

Theme 5 – A Modern and Diverse workforce

In 2009/10 the Council has:-

- Established and is making good progress within a programme for reviewing and updating HR policies and undertaking Equality Impact Assessments on HR Policies and people management processes.
- Collected manpower statistical information including analysis on all equality groups which is informing the workforce development plan currently being developed.
- Provided quarterly monitoring reports to HR Panel on key workforce data and continued to deliver Equality and Diversity training for staff and Members

Case Study 4 – The Big Babergh Initiative

The Big Babergh Initiative (BBI) was trialled during Easter 2009 and continues this year offering a fully inclusive programme of activities for children and young people between the ages of 5 and 19 years during school holiday periods (excluding Christmas).

The BBI gives children and young people the opportunity to be able to participate in challenging activities enabling them to acquire greater social skills and encouraging the development of peer relationships and respect for each other.

The BBI project works with partners, local communities, local groups (e.g. TANK) and Parish Councils, to secure the use of playing fields and community facilities in order to bring events into rural areas to overcome transport difficulties, ensuring participants do not have to travel far to a venue and have a far greater choice of activities and locations.

The Big Babergh Initiative is an example of the Council working with its partners to enable children and young people including those living in rural, isolated and deprived areas access to a diverse range of play and activities.

Approach to be taken in 2010/11

- 6.6 At the time of writing, the Council's statutory Single Equality Scheme and Action Plan are under review and subject to a 12-week consultation period. It is anticipated the revised Scheme will be taken to Strategy Committee in January 2011, with a recommendation that it be approved by Full Council in February 2011. This will ensure the Scheme is fully aligned with the Council's Medium Term Plans 2011-14 and One year Delivery Plan.
- 6.7 In order that progress is maintained during 2010/11, a meeting of the Theme Leads has been arranged for early October. The purpose of that meeting will be twofold:
- (i) To determine a proportionate approach to future efforts to obtain the 'achieving' level of the new Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) given the considerable impact of the BMI-project on staff time and resources.
 - (ii) To ensure the Council is prepared for the forthcoming Equality Act 2010, the main provisions of which come into effect from 1 October 2010. (The Act brings together, harmonises and in some respects extends the current equality law and it is important that relevant staff understand the changes and implications for their areas of work).

7. APPENDICES

None.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS REFERRED TO:

None.

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