

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE POLICY COMMITTEE 1 JULY 1999

NOTE: Copies of the reports mentioned below have been sent to all members of the Policy Committee and other members who had requested them. Further copies are available from Janet Purcell, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Telephone: 01992 555562)

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN HERTFORDSHIRE

1.1 Equal Opportunities Policy

The Committee have agreed an Equal Opportunities policy entitled "Putting People First". This brings together the Council's existing policies on both service delivery and employment, but also takes account of statutory changes (such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995) and other developments, including the County Council's adoption of the Commission for Racial Equality Standards for Local Authorities ("Racial Equality means Quality").

The result is an 'integrated' document covering the broad range of responsibilities of the County Council both as employer and as provider of services. The document has been developed following wide consultation with employees, members and community groups and covers the following areas:-

Part 1 – General Statement/Underlying principles and intentions includes:

- Specific statements of intent concerning the Council's commitment to equality and to taking action to ensure that equality becomes a reality for all
- Identification of responsibilities for implementing and communicating the policy
- Action the County Council will take to implement, monitor and review the policy, including the role of elected members in this process

Part 2 – Equality in Employment includes statements of commitment to:

- Recruit and retain a workforce which is representative of the makeup of the population of Hertfordshire and commitment to taking positive action to achieve this
- consultation and involvement of employees on employment issues
- creating a working environment where every employee is treated with dignity and respect

Part 3 – Equality in Delivery of Services includes statements of commitment to:

- consulting with service users and community groups to establish user needs and satisfaction levels
- monitoring core services by age, disability, ethnicity and gender
- developing and implementing service departmental action plans

Part 4 – Identification of Target Groups

This section recognises that discrimination and prejudice can take many forms and identifies those groups of people in society who are likely to be particularly at risk.

1.2 Strategy for Implementation

The Committee have agreed a strategy for implementation which includes:-

- (i) the setting of employment equality targets with a view to the workplace being representative of the population of Hertfordshire.
- (ii) the setting of targets to achieve CRE Standards on racial equality.
- (iii) the implementation of departmental action plans.
- (iv) an equality training strategy for staff which ensures customer and staff equality awareness needs are identified.
- (v) a communication and consultation strategy to ensure the application of consistent standards for all people in Hertfordshire.
- (vi) the further development of the Black Workers' Group, Employees Forum and Women's Network.

1.3 Member Overview

An Equalities Panel of 8 County Councillors has been established to:-

- have responsibility for the overall co-ordination and monitoring of the progress in implementing the policy.
- consider draft departmental equality action plans prior to their referral to the relevant service committees.
- report on overall progress.

1.4 The McPherson Report and the Home Secretary's Action Plan – Implications for the County Council

The report by Sir William McPherson into the Metropolitan Police investigation of the murder of Stephen Lawrence which took place in Eltham, South London in April 1993 concludes that it “was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism and a failure of leadership by senior officers”.

Whilst the majority of recommendations in the McPherson Report relate specifically to the Police Authority, there are many recommendations which are relevant to local government either directly, through its partnership responsibilities with the Police under the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 or indirectly through its obligations under the Race Relations Act 1976. These recommendations encompass employment, training and development, community safety, education, housing consultation, community leadership and social exclusion.

The County Council action on racial equality will be reviewed in the light of the guidance from the Local Government Association on the implications of the McPherson report.

1.5 Conclusion

“Putting People First” and its implementation strategy stipulate clear requirements in relation to consultation with users of services, monitoring uptake of services, achieving a representative workforce, meeting the CRE standards within a defined timeframe, equality training for staff, monitoring of development opportunities and positive action in relation to recruitment, training and development. These are all actions that local authorities should be taking to identify and challenge discriminatory practices.

A further report will be made in December:-

- detailing progress against the employment, service delivery and Audit Commission indicators 1998/99.
- informing the Committee of progress made by departments in developing their equality action plans.
- setting out how departments will achieve level 3 of the Commission for Racial Equality Standards by March 2000.

2. SCHEME OF DELEGATION TO COMMITTEES

The Policy Committee have proposed some amendments to the constitution of committees. These are set out in the recommendation below.

RECOMMENDATION

That the County Council make the following changes to the committee structure (Scheme of Delegation to Committees):-

- (i) Development Control Committee to be replaced by a Development Control Sub-Committee of Environment Committee with a membership of 8.
- (ii) trading standards, consumer protection, animal health, public health, licensing, weights & measures, and food authority to be transferred from Information and Access Committee to Protection Committee; and the Registration of births, marriages and deaths, the coroners service and rent officer service transfer from Protection Committee to Information and Access Committee.
- (iii) the Standards Panel to have a composition of 2 County Councillors; and 4 independents, one of whom will take the chair.

**Robert Ellis
Chairman
County Hall
Hertford**

1 July 1999