1) Meeting: Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion
2) Date: 19th October 2006
3) Title: The Equality Standard for Local Government – initial feedback from external audit (All Wards)
4) Programme Area: Chief Executive’s Department

5) Summary

Auditors from the Centre for Local Policy Studies carried out an external validation of the Council’s achievement of level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government between May and August 2006. This report sets out initial feedback from the auditors.

6) Recommendations

That Elected Members:

1. Welcome the auditors’ validation of the Council’s achievement of Level 3, subject to internal moderation by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA).

2. Notes the findings of the audit (see paragraphs 7.3 and appendix 1).

3. Notes that CMT have agreed to receive a revised action plan for achieving level 4, to be developed with the involvement and consultation of the Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy Group, by 31 October 2006.

4. Notes that CMT have recommended that feedback from the external validation is reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny, once formal notification is received from the auditors.
7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Background

The Equality Standard for Local Government (ESLG) was developed as a tool to enable local authorities to mainstream disability, gender and race equality into council policy and practice at all levels. It recognises the importance of fair treatment and equal access to Council services and employment. The Equality Standard has been adopted by the Audit Commission as a Best Value performance indicator (BV2a).

Progress through the levels of the Equality Standard is measured through self-assessment. Councils are required to produce documentation covering all services areas to demonstrate achievement at each level claimed. External audit is required at levels 3 and 5. The audit is designed to build in external validation of the self assessment, support benchmarking and provide guidance for improvement.

The external auditors have to be accredited to carry out audits of the Equality Standard. This is to ensure the audit process is rigorous and reliable. I&DeA in partnership with the Centre for Local Policy Studies, Edge Hill University, administer and validate the audit process and provide quality control.

7.2 Methodology of the audit

The audit is made up of 3 interrelated parts:

- Examination of self-assessment documents for completeness and consistency with levels 1, 2 and 3 criteria
- Interviews with a range of council staff (to test the self assessment claim corporately and by department/service area); and interviews with relevant partners and interest groups.
- Examination of documentary evidence for consistency with self assessment and interview findings

A numerical rating system is used in the formal assessment to support findings for each element of level 3 of the ESLG. Scores are 4, 3, 2, 1 – with 4 being the highest and 1 the lowest. The scores summarise a qualitative judgement of the council’s performance in relation to that element. The scores assigned to each element relate only to level 3 and not to any more general judgement about equality performance. To achieve the appropriate level, an authority needs to achieve an average score of 3.

The ‘interviews’ stage of the assessment included individual interviews with Councillors, Council senior managers and representatives of partner and community organisations; a series of focus groups with a cross section of council staff and group interviews of equalities officers (both corporate officers and officers from Programme Areas).

7.3 Auditors Findings

Initial feedback received from the auditors confirms that RMBC has achieved level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. Scores against each area of the standard put the Council at score 3 and 4, which indicates strong achievement in all areas. A summary of scores is included in appendix 1. This judgement is subject to moderation from the I&DeA.
The following is a summary of the findings included in the auditors’ initial feedback report. Areas for improvement have been identified to consolidate and sustain achievements at level 3 and to move to level 4:

7.3.1 Leadership and Corporate Commitment

Strengths
- Strong commitment from the leadership of the council to the equality standard and its benefits.
- That the Council has in place an appropriate corporate structure for driving equalities in the form of a corporate equalities and strategy group, chaired at a high level.
- That it has in place a system of equality advisors/responsible officers that has worked well to support developments.
- That there has been extensive training and information provision for members and senior officers.
- That it has effective business planning and performance management systems in place.
- That the Council has well developed and interlinked set of equality plans.
- Programme areas are producing equality action plans.
- Actions and targets are clearly linked to corporate and community priorities.
- That it has systems in place for ensuring that all external contractors meet well defined employment and service delivery equality criteria.
- Without exception, all those that took part, praised the Corporate Equality Team, for the high level and quality of advice support, guidance and training/information that they receive. This is a highly respected and valued team.

Areas identified for improvement:
- Although the council has in place a comprehensive range of support structures for embedding equalities into service and corporate planning, there is at present wide variations in the quality and extent of this (corporate planning). This is not unusual or surprising. The next stage for the council is to improve the quality and consistency of service planning and of individual equality action plans.
- Encourage M3/4 managers to ensure that the council’s aims and objectives for the equality and diversity strategy are communicated consistently to their staff – i.e. Managers must play their part fully.
- Ensure that equal/improved weighting is given to all areas of equality/interest groups/stakeholders – for example, stronger emphasis on race/BME issues perceived than on some areas – gender/disability/lgbt.
- Continue work with members to ensure they understand and are confident with the equalities agenda.

7.3.2 Consultation and Community Development and Scrutiny

Strengths
- That consultation on equality is linked to the development of the council’s corporate plan, strategic plans and equality plans.
- That the Council has opened its objective and target setting processes to consultation and scrutiny from stakeholder and partnership groups.
- That the Council has consulted with a range of local groups on the way in which it will open itself to scrutiny. That this objective is clearly set out in its Corporate Plan and within the Community Strategy.
- That the Council has an internal scrutiny system in place.
That the Council has placed a substantial amount of information relating to equality objectives and targets on its public websites.

That the Council has appropriate language and translation services available during consultation.

Areas identified for improvement

The Council has acknowledged that it needs to do more to engage with a much broader range of groups, and acknowledges that the demographics of Rotherham are changing rapidly. This was also borne out by the interviews and focus groups, and the gaps apparent in some Programme Area equality plans/service plans.

In particular the Council should seek to improve engagement with groups/stakeholders/staff from disability, gender and LGBT communities.

7.3.3 Service Delivery and Customer Care

Strengths

That all Programme Areas have equality action plans in place, and these take account of the Race Equality Scheme.

That all Programme Areas have undertaken equality impact assessments.

That the Council has developed an effective equality impact assessment process.

Equality impact assessment reports show well-developed objective and target setting process.

That the council is preparing its Disability Equality Scheme.

That it has in place corporate guidance and support to support establishment of effective monitoring.

Programme Areas are developing information collection systems as appropriate

Procurement/contractor guidelines are in place.

Areas identified for improvement

The Council should seek to improve engagement with disabled staff, stakeholders and other designated disabled groups, as this was identified as an area of weakness.

The Council’s Programme Areas now need to work with the corporate support available to improve information and monitoring at a local level, and this in turn will need to be demonstrated in improving equality action plans and priorities at these levels.

Monitor agencies and services (delivered through contracting/procurement), using results to inform improvements.

7.3.4 Employment and Training

Strengths

The Council has set targets for improving workforce profiles.

That the Council has undertaken a comprehensive equal pay review based on job evaluation.

That the Council has begun the process of equal pay adjustment and has clear plans in place for equal pay adjustment.

Equality principles are clearly stated in employment literature available to all staff.

Managers and staff have taken part in a range of equality training.

Managers and staff have a very clear understanding of the equality priorities of the council.

That the performance appraisal systems and arrangements contribute to the effective monitoring of service level equality action planning.

Equality and diversity is a core management competency.

Areas identified for improvement
The perception from the focus groups was that the council needs to give more thought on how to boost the employment of disabled people, and what support they need (also applies to reasonable adjustment), and to ensure that they were consulted appropriately.

(Training) is an area of strength for the council, however it needs to keep training and support for staff under review to ensure the consistent application of the principles learned across all areas.

Create opportunities for more training and awareness sessions for all staff.

7.4 Action required to achieve Level 4

The Auditors have judged the Council to be well-placed to proceed to level 4. In order to move onwards, the Council will have to show that it has achieved progress against the level 3 targets that it set for race, gender and disability. New guidance requires that by 2009 the Council is able to demonstrate progress across the authority for sexual orientation, age, religion and belief and this will be a requirement for reporting BV2a (the level of the Equality Standard to which the authority conforms). Planning for this needs to start now.

The Council will also have to demonstrate:

- It has developed information and monitoring systems that will allow it to assess progress in achieving targets.
- It is measuring progress against targets and effectively using its information and monitoring systems.
- Monitoring reports are being produced at specific intervals and circulated to designated consultation and scrutiny groups.
- It is using the self assessment process to review and revise targets and its monitoring and consultation systems.
- Self assessment includes the involvement of designated staff, community and stakeholders groups and seeks external validation through community involvement, peer review or expert opinion.
- It has continued to carry out impact assessments for new policies and where gaps are identified through self assessment.
- It has initiated a new round of action planning and target setting.
- Monitoring systems are providing useful information towards specific targets.

In their initial feedback, the auditors have made additional recommendations on the priority areas where the Council should concentrate its efforts to achieve Level 4. These are set out at Appendix 2.

7.5 Next steps

It is recommended that a revised action plan to achieve Level 4 will be developed with the Corporate Equality and Diversity Strategy Group, following further discussion and feedback from the auditors. It is proposed that this action plan will be subject to a further report to CMT for discussion and approval by 31 October 2006.

A report to Cabinet, the Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Scrutiny will be made once formal notification of the feedback is received from the auditors.

8. Finance

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1 Criteria set out in the Revised Equality Standard Guidance – 2006, IDeA/CLPS
The costs of the external validation will be no more than £7k plus travel and accommodation, which is fully inclusive of site visits, inspection, and reporting back. This is a reduction from the £12k full fee payable by council’s after the piloting of the validation exercise. The costs have been found from existing budgets within the Chief Executive’s Department.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Demonstrable achievement towards the Equality Standard is critical to CPA and other audit/inspection frameworks. It is important that the Council’s declared level can be evidenced robustly and that progress is maintained to achieve levels 4 and 5. This is strengthened through the external validation process.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

This performance-led approach to mainstreaming equality will contribute to achieving sustainable social and economic improvements for Rotherham Borough, demonstrate in action Rotherham’s vision for Fairness as set out in the Community Strategy and contribute to eliminating the deprivation identified in the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

This report summarises initial feedback from the RMBC Formal Assessment and Validation at Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government carried out by Dr Julian Clarke and Ms Nasreen Kaleem, Centre for Local Policy Studies, Edge Hill University.

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## Scoring Summary

The tables below summarise the quantifiable documentary evidence provided, against each of the elements of the ESLG. The assessments are divided into Corporate and Service areas. A score is given for each individual assessment area.

### Leadership and Corporate Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All departments and service areas set targets based on equality objectives</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate guidance is in place for information gathering and equality monitoring</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement on equality targets with local partners/ships</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms are in place for equality for contractors and contract management</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed equality action plans at departmental and service levels incorporating performance indicators</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have adopted national targets and performance indicators as required. Action planning linked to best value</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems in place for implementing and revising the Corporate Equality Plan and departmental action plans</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members and senior officers have endorsed action plans as appropriate</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions on achieving targets has started</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Consultation and Community Development & Scrutiny

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service level and employment objectives and targets are available for consultation and scrutiny</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language services and other access provision in place to designated community/scrutiny groups</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed full and systematic consultation with designated/staff/stakeholders. Consultation undertaken involving the above groups</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation linked to continuous development of community strategy</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicise how, when and where actions on targets will start</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Service Delivery and Customer Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Equality Plan is Consistent with the Race Equality Scheme</td>
<td>Yes (*DES being developed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality objectives and targets are developed within each department/service area</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service plans address barriers to accessibility and reasonable adjustments in providing services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate resources allocated to achieve targets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures for responsibility for meeting targets and taking action in place at departmental and service area levels</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set time-tables within action plans in place for creating/adapting and monitoring information in services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality standards established for contractors and those delivering services on behalf of the council</td>
<td>Policy in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts are monitored to secure equal employment and service delivery targets</td>
<td>Policy in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Started on departmental and service area targets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Employment and Training</strong></th>
<th><strong>Evidence</strong></th>
<th><strong>Score</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment section of Corporate Equality Plan consistent with Race Equality Scheme</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment targets are set for recruitment, retention of workforce</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal Pay Review and plan for pay adjustment conducted</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality policy and procedure established as part of staff handbook and understood by staff</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff and members are aware of action plans and the implications for services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is provided for managers on the implementation of the ESLG for partners/contractors</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for all staff involved in recruitment- consistent with ESLG and the Race Equality Scheme</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A system of guidance and training relevant to short-listing panels and interviewers in place</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training for all staff on the detailed implementation of the ESLG – including updates on legal and other requirements</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality objectives and targets are built into management appraisals</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate levels of information and training are provided on action plans to support scrutiny process</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action started on employment and pay targets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback from Auditors on Priority Areas for Achieving Level 4

Leadership and Corporate Commitment/Consultation and Community Development and Scrutiny

- the council should seek to make it’s corporate assessment of Programme Areas monitoring and self-assessment information more robust. The council has done extremely well, setting in place a clear system for the systematic integration of the equality standard. For level 4 it will need to demonstrate that it is able to assess the adequacy of the systems/monitoring/information at a Programme Area level. We would suggest that the equalities steering group/corporate equalities team work with Programme Area managers on presenting evidence for assessment, that clearly follows the guidance and templates provided.

- set up a system for review of Programme Area and Employment monitoring reports by designated consultation and community groups. Again we are of the view that the council has done much to make links with such groups, however some of the evidence suggests that this area could be further developed so that groups are much more engaged in a two-way process with the council. There is clear evidence that the council has acknowledged that it could do much more to engage with groups that are currently under-represented or have a low profile within the consultation framework, and new targets and action plans be developed with greater involvement of stakeholders.

- start to establish and self assess targets for sexual orientation, religion and belief and age. In addition we would suggest that the council re-visits it’s approach to gender and disability criteria and the progress being made in these areas by Programme Areas, and address any gaps identified. This will enable the council to be well on the way to addressing and taking a more consistent approach to the range of equality areas as required by changing legislation, and the equality standard deadline of 2009, as well as making improvements in line with the requirements of audit and inspection regimes.

Service Delivery and Customer Care

We would suggest that the council pays particular attention to the following:

- Programme Area (service) managers are fully involved in the self-assessment process, review and revise targets and monitoring and consultation systems
- service delivery monitoring reports are circulated to all designated groups
- address gaps in some equality areas (e.g. disability, gender, sexuality) to ensure consistency and equality of application and access for customers and staff

Employment and Training

We would suggest that the council pays particular attention to the following:

- report on the implementation and outcomes of the pay review assessments and recommendations
- review training needs against service action plans and against the outcomes of the focus group discussion and revise training plan to deliver appropriate competencies/behaviours
- incorporate targets for revised training plans in appraisals
- consider specialised training needs, for example for Members