

Title: Diversity Strategy – Producing an Equalities Scheme

Purpose: For information

Date of meeting: 24 March 2010

Responsible officer: Graham Clark

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Attachments: None

1 Overview

- 1.1 This paper sets out where we currently are in our work on diversity and, in particular, focuses on the next step of producing an Equalities Scheme for Consumer Focus.

2 Action for the Board

- 2.1 To note the direction of travel
- 2.2 To note that, for reasons of best practice, we intend to produce an Equalities Scheme for Consumer Focus that covers the six strands provided for in the Equality Bill (ie race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief).
- 2.3 To note the aim for the Equalities Scheme to be operational by end September 2010.

3 Diversity Strategy

There are 2 strands to our Diversity Work at Consumer Focus, namely (i) our role as an Employer and (ii) our role as a Policy and Advocacy Body.

3.1 Our role as an Employer

- 3.1.1 HR, with oversight from HR Committee, leads in this area.
- 3.1.1.1 All of our policies and procedures need to be compliant with Equal Opportunities Legislation, the nature of some of which will change once the Equality Bill receives Royal Assent (see below). We have completed the work on re-drafting our policies and these are now being signed off by the Senior Management Team. As part of the sign-off process, all our policies and procedures have been looked at independently by ACAS to ensure they are compliant with current legislation.
- 3.1.1.2 We have also started to roll out mandatory Diversity Training across the whole of Consumer Focus. As well as covering the main strands of existing equal opportunities legislation and looking at what Diversity means in practice, the course also covers the issues of bullying and harassment, asking all to reflect on the impact on colleagues of the tone of verbal and written communications. This is of particular relevance in an advocacy organisation where many of the roles demand a degree of adversarial

behaviour in order for individuals to be effective in putting across the views of the organisation in the environment in which we operate.

- 3.1.1.3 There is more that we need to do in our role as an employer to move us from the Equal Opportunities Space to a Diversity Space, as discussed below.

3.2 **Our role as a Policy/Advocacy Body**

- 3.2.1 Here the work is more challenging. Given the fact that our role is to represent the views of all consumers in the UK we clearly need to become smarter at defining both the scope of all of our policy work at the Genesis stage, being clear as to whether the work covers the diverse issues of all communities (ie all consumers are the same), or whether it will concentrate on looking only at a sub-set of the UK population.
- 3.2.2 Similarly, once a piece of policy/advocacy work is completed we need to re-visit the assumptions on coverage set out at the beginning of the strand of work and look at whether our findings impact on all consumers in the same way, or whether there are differential impacts on different groups of consumers. One way of doing this would be to publish some kind of Diversity Impact Assessment for all our policy work.
- 3.2.3 Clearly, there is more work to do to get us from how we currently operate to where we should ideally be operating in the policy area. The work to get us from where we are today to where we want to be is similar to the work currently being undertaken within the organisation to agree our corporate approach to embedding sustainability consumer principles into all of our policy work, an issue to which we shall return at the All Boards' Awayday on 8 June 2010.

4 **Equalities Scheme**

- 4.1 An Equalities Scheme is over-arching and would cover Consumer Focus' responsibilities both as an Employer and as a Policy/Advocacy Body. Equalities Schemes originated from the findings of the MacPherson Inquiry and currently force organisations to think about how to reduce inequalities under three specific headings in the workplace, namely race, gender and disability.
- 4.2 We do not currently have an Equalities Scheme in Consumer Focus, and this is an area where we are deficient. ACAS advise that we are not alone as an NDPB in not having an Equalities Scheme but that we need to start rectifying this as soon as possible. However, the scope for Equalities Schemes will broaden substantially when the Equality Bill receives Royal Assent.
- 4.3 Consequently, we plan to engage a Consultant soon to help us draft an Equalities Scheme for Consumer Focus. Clearly, a Scheme must cover race, gender and disability (narrow focus), but given that it the Equality Bill looks like it will receive Royal Assent before Dissolution, as a matter of best practice we will broaden our scheme to cover the additional strands covered by that Bill, ie age, sexual orientation, religion or belief.

5 **Equalities Bill**

- 5.1 The Equality Bill has completed Report Stage in the Lords and is awaiting 3rd reading in the Lords (date unknown). It will then go back for 3rd Reading in the Commons. Indications are, however, that is likely to receive Royal Assent before Dissolution.
- 5.2 The main purpose of the Bill is to set out groundbreaking new laws which will help narrow the gap between rich and poor; require business to report on gender pay;

outlaw age discrimination; and will significantly strengthen Britain's anti-discrimination legislation.

The main areas on which the Bill focuses are:

- **Women** - the Equality Bill will shine a spotlight on gender pay discrimination, workplace by workplace, so problems can be identified and action taken, as well as using procurement and reporting to improve equality for women. Introducing gender pay reports. Public authorities with more than 150 employees will be required to report on gender pay.
- **Older People** - with the number of people over 85 set to double in the next 20 years, it is essential that older people are not discriminated because of their age. The Equality Bill will ban age discrimination and place a duty on public bodies to ensure older people play a full role in society and that they are treated fairly.
- **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups** - the Equality Bill will allow employers to choose to take positive action to appoint a person from an under-represented group, provided candidates are equally suitable, and so balance things out if they want to, as well as using procurement and reporting to improve equality.
- **Disabled People** - the Equality Bill will, amongst other things, make life fairer for disabled people by protecting people who for example care for a disabled child or relative.
- **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual People** - the Equality Bill will put a duty on public bodies to consider the needs of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people when designing and delivering public services.
- **Religion and Belief** - the Equality Bill will put a duty on public bodies to consider the needs of people who use their services or works for them, regardless of their religion or belief.
- **Business** -the Equality Bill will streamline the law; distilling nine pieces of legislation and around 100 other measures into by a single Act written in plain English to make it easier for individuals and employers to understand their legal rights and obligations.

5.3 The Equality Bill will cover England, Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland has its own equality legislation.

6 Proposal

6.1 To note the production of an Equalities Scheme (broad basis, ie addressing all the strands covered in the Equality Bill) for September 2010.

7 Resources

7.1 We will be engaging the service of a suitably-qualified consultant to do this work.

8 Next steps

8.1 The Equalities Scheme will be ready for September 2010. This is crucial to our being able to capture diversity issues in the business cases for the draft 2011-12 Annual Plan.