

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

HOUSING COMMITTEE – 26 JANUARY 2005

RACE RELATIONS (AMENDMENT) ACT 2000

Report by Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report action taken and progress made in implementing the Council's Race Equality Scheme (Year 2) within the Housing Service.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 provides that all local authorities have a statutory "general duty" to work to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination, and to promote equal opportunities and good race relations. The duty is not optional and local authorities have to meet it even if the ethnic minority populations in their areas are small.
- 2.2 The Council at its meeting of 24 October 2002 approved the adoption of a Race Equality Scheme for East Ayrshire in line with the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. It was also agreed that each department would prepare and submit a report outlining the impact of the Act upon their particular service areas by undertaking an initial assessment of functions and policies for the purposes of developing and implementing a departmental action plan.
- 2.3 The Housing Committee at its meeting of 26 March 2003, approved the department's action plan to conduct an initial assessment of each of its functions and policy areas, using the Race Equality Scheme's guidance and the methodology endorsed by the Commission for Racial Equality (i.e. functions and policies were to be classified into **High, Medium or Low Relevance** with regard to their impact on race equality and reviewed on a three year cycle).
- 2.4 Having completed a review of the High Relevance areas within the service (reported to Committee on 28 January 2004), a review of Medium Relevance areas was carried out in accordance with the Race Equality Scheme in relation to:
- **Estate Management**
 - **Nominations**
 - **Rent Arrears**
 - **Repairs**
 - **Tenancy Support**

3. REVIEW OF SERVICE AREAS

- 3.1** The department has conducted reviews, based on the criteria established by the Commission for Racial Equality, of the service areas referred to in paragraph 2.4 above.
- 3.2** The criteria for these reviews took the form of:
- (a) Did the functions/policies have any relevance to race equality as defined by the “general duty” of eliminating discrimination, promoting equal opportunities or promoting good race relations?
 - (b) Is there is any evidence to believe that some racial groups could be affected differently? And if so which racial groups?
 - (c) The amount of evidence, if any, to support answers to question (b).
 - (d) Is there any public concern that the policy or service was being carried out in a discriminatory way?
- 3.3** The reviews of the service areas, which included an examination of long standing ‘customs and practices’, management decisions and written policies have established that all the associated polices and functions have been and are applied to all sections of the community in a fair and equal manner. No evidence came to light to indicate that any policy or function has had any adverse implications or effects on any service user from the ethnic minority groups.
- 3.4** Monitoring arrangements for Estate Management, Nominations and Tenancy Support are in place to identify if there is any evidence to indicate that some racial groups could be affected differently by the policies and functions of these service areas. The Estate management Service has recently been subjected to a Peer Review which found that our policies and procedures promoted equal opportunities. Incidences of racial graffiti in estates is recorded and arrangements are in place to have this removed as soon as possible where this is encountered, generally within 24 hours. Nominations arrangements are based on the Council’s Allocations policy, whilst the monitoring of subsequent RSL allocations is by means of the SCORE system which monitors allocations to ethnic groups. Tenancy Support is currently working towards Homepoint accreditation which promotes equal opportunities.
- 3.5** The Rent Arrears system generates its own action recommendations, based on established and approved policies. There is, therefore, little scope for any discrimination to be introduced into this system. All over-rides are subject to audit. These processes are regularly audited by local management. Court actions and evictions are authorised by management. The Repairs process has a quality control system by means of random post-inspection. Categorisation of repairs is standardised by means of the Repair Finder system. There is, however, no routine ethnic monitoring in either Repairs or

Rent arrears systems. There is no direct evidence to indicate that any racial group is being affected differently when they access these services.

4. COMMUNICATIONS DIFFICULTIES

- 4.1** The department has no evidence from the ethnic minority groups in East Ayrshire that members of staff are unwilling to try and understand and communicate where a language barrier exists. However, there is a recognition that communication difficulties, due to the inability of a person to speak, read, or understand English can present difficulties, which could result in members of ethnic minorities having less access to the department's services than other customers in the general population.
- 4.2** In an effort to remove this form of racial inequality the department has prepared a number of basic information leaflets in the three main ethnic minority languages of East Ayrshire, namely Cantonese, Punjabi and Urdu. The leaflets provide a brief description of the department's services and how they may be accessed. In addition, the leaflets explain that the department will provide the services of an interpreter via a telephone link at its customer contact points to assist with their enquiries.
- 4.3** The department has in place a contract with a Translation Service who will provide various means of access to interpreters across a wide range of foreign languages. 'Language Point Cards', are prominently displayed in Area and Local Council Offices. The cards enable non-English speaking customers to point to their language in order that staff can make telephone contact with an interpreter in order to establish the customer's needs and access to the appropriate service.
- 4.4** The Translation Service has been 'mystery shopped' at Area Offices and some recommended improvements have been introduced. The service has since been used once, authentically, with a successful outcome.

5. PROMOTING RACE EQUALITY

- 5.1** The department is committed to the aim of the "general duty" and will continue to make race equality central to the way it delivers its services. In order to achieve this, arrangements are in place to:
- assess the impact of our existing and new policies and functions to ensure we continue to promote race equality
 - consult with people who are likely to be affected by our services and their implications for promoting race equality
 - review and revise our policies and functions, if assessment and consultation reveals that they have had or may have an adverse impact on some racial groups within the community

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** The management of Race Equalities Scheme is met from within existing budgets.

7. LEGAL/POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** The introduction and publication of the Council's Race Equality Scheme for East Ayrshire ensures that the Council complies with the requirements in this respect as laid down by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and by the Scottish Parliament.

- 7.2** The activities laid out in this report comply fully with the Council's Race Equality Scheme and with the legal implications as laid out in the Act. They also support the objectives of the Council's Equality Opportunities Policy and those for improving opportunities within the East Ayrshire Community Plan.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1** The Committee is asked to:

- (i) approve the departmental actions detailed within this report and described in paragraphs 3 - 5 above;
- (ii) note that the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services will provide a report on the department's third year progress after 30 November 2005; and
- (iii) otherwise note the contents of this report.

William Stafford
Executive Director of Neighbourhood Services

7 January 2005

CMCA/GD/LA

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Report by Depute Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Resources to the Council on 24 October 2002.

For further information, please contact Gerry Darroch, Operations Manager on 01563 574873.

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