REVIEW OF THE EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

Executive summary

1. This paper provides a report on the review of the SPCB Equality Framework and outlines the proposals for a new Framework for Equality. It invites the SPCB to agree the current draft Framework comprising a new Equality Strategy (Annex A) and a Single Equality Action Plan (Annex B).

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Issues and Options

Background

3. In August 2010, we commenced the review of the Equality Framework, with a deadline of completing the project by April 2011 when the new Public Sector Equality Duty – as established by the Equality Act 2010 – takes effect. This is also the first review of the Framework since it was introduced in 2003.

4. With this in mind, the review was tasked with developing proposals for a new Framework that took account of the requirements of the Equality Act while being mindful of the SPCB’s current financial position. This meant considering from the very outset the need to streamline our monitoring and reporting arrangements whilst also taking account of the financial position in considering how best to meet our equality objectives over the next four years.

Project approach

5. The project was delivered through a series of workstreams set up to focus on each different stage throughout of the project: The purpose of these workstreams was to:

   • Map the existing Framework to identify areas of priority and any potential gaps in relation to the requirements of the Equality Act;

   • Review the current Equality Schemes and Action Plans on race, disability and gender to identify any action to be carried forward;

   • Consult with internal and external stakeholders (including Members and the Equal Opportunities Committee), involving a diverse range of equality groups from across Scotland;
• Review and revise monitoring and reporting arrangements for equality and develop a new approach to action planning with groups and offices; and

• Draft the new Framework including the new Equality Strategy, equality objectives, revised monitoring and reporting arrangements and any relevant policies and guidance.

A New Framework

6. The SPCB is invited to consider and comment on the draft new Equality Framework, comprising:

• Equality Strategy (Annex A)
• Single Equality Action Plan (Annex B)

7. In consultation with external stakeholders, it was gratifying to note that many of the issues which we were being pressed to achieve are actually practices which we have already adopted in this organisation. We adjusted our approach to the Single Equality Action Plan to ensure that we reflected the improvements which have been made over the last eight years and have become standard practice.

Mainstreaming and streamlining

8. The Single Equality Action Plan will become part of the new Framework and replaces the existing Schemes and separate Actions Plans on race, disability and gender. The Single Equality Action Plan identifies our current practices and any new SMART objectives to be delivered in 2011-15 taking account of all nine protected equality groups.

9. As our intention is to review the Framework every four years, it will be the responsibility of Heads of Group to ensure that the objectives are being met and incorporated in operational plans. There will no longer be formal reporting of the Action Plan as we previously took with the Equality Schemes on race, disability and gender.

10. In the absence of any formal reporting of the Action Plan, the Equality Manager will have a role in supporting the Heads of Group in meeting their equality objectives and will seek to undertake an informal approach to monitoring progress. This will enable the Equality Manager to update the action plan and reflect any changing priorities.

Reduced reporting burden

11. The effect of having a Single Equality Action Plan and reviewing it every four years, is that it significantly reduces the level of reporting that we currently carry out. This comprises annual reporting on each of the Equality Schemes to the Leadership Group and SPCB.
12. Further reductions in reporting are being proposed as part of this Framework. In line with our commitment to mainstreaming, our intention is to no longer produce the Equality Annual Report, which involves a further updating exercise from offices, and instead, incorporate a summary equality report into the SPCB Annual Report.

13. Having said that, we still have our legal obligations to meet on producing annual publishing of data gathered on our services and employment policies. An annual report on monitoring data will be provided to the Leadership Group with a view to publishing this data. We envisage this report to be attached as an annex to the SPCB Annual Report. The action plan outlines the monitoring data which we will gather every year.

Conclusion

14. By undertaking these changes to the structure, we will focus our attention on more value added work such as promoting equality across business areas in the Parliament. We will also be able to produce more quality data and provide further support to offices on addressing their business needs in relation to equality matters.

15. At the very outset of this review, we were mindful of our financial situation and the need for flexibility in meeting our objectives for the next four years. We have prioritised which business areas to focus on, updated the Action Plan to reflect what we already do in practice and significantly reduced the reporting structures. However, it is clear that we will not compromise on equality and our proposals demonstrate a robust Framework for Equality with a continued programme of action so that the Parliament remains an exemplar both in its commitment to equality and also to adopting a pragmatic, value-added approach to delivery.

Resource Implications

16. There are no additional costs associated with the new Framework. To expand on this, generally, the costs with implementing the Single Equality Action Plan relate mainly to staff costs or are already covered by existing budgets. There will be savings in staff costs as a result of the streamlined approach to monitoring and reporting.

17. Any actions which were included in the original draft plan that had significant cost implications have either been postponed or approached in a different way to avoid additional costs. If significant potential additional costs emerge as a result of taking forward an equality objective we would expect this cost to be considered alongside the benefits, as would be the case with the prioritisation of any project or service improvement work.
Governance Issues

18. The drafting of the new Framework is the delivery phase of the project. Standard project governance has been followed. A Project Report will be produced as part of our legal duties under the Equality Act and made available on the Parliament website.

Publication Scheme

19. This paper should be published under the SPCB’s Publication Scheme as there is a legal obligation upon the SPCB to publish its equality objectives and provide evidence of how they were achieved.

Next steps

20. Once the SPCB has considered, agreed/revised this Framework, we will publish the Framework on the Parliament website by April 2011. This timescale will ensure that the Parliament meets its legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

Decision

21. The SPCB is invited to:

   a. Consider and revise/agree the Equality Strategy (Annex A)

   b. Consider and revise/agree the Single Equality Action Plan (Annex B)

Strategy and Change Management Office/ Human Resources Office
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