

# Forest Heath District Council

(This report is not a key decision. This report has been subject to appropriate notice of publication under the Council's Access to Information Rules)

## Report of the Cabinet Member for Families and Communities

**CABINET**

**9 APRIL 2013**

**CAB13/086**

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT DIVERSITY WORKING PARTY** (Key Decision Reference: APR13/02)

#### **1. Summary and reasons for recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council have already established the principle of working together to consider and agree matters which affect both districts uniformly. This creates a consistent approach for communities and reduces duplication of effort under a shared officer structure.
- 1.2 This report proposes the establishment of a Cabinet Joint Working Party in which common issues around equality and diversity within the Council and across West Suffolk can be debated and appropriate policies and procedures developed as necessary. Terms for Reference including membership proposals have been developed and are attached as Appendix A.

#### **2. Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 **It is recommended that a Cabinet Joint Working Party be established to operate as a Joint Diversity Working Party across both Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, with Terms of Reference and Membership as set out in Appendix A.**

#### **Contact details**

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#### **Portfolio holder**

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### **3. How will the recommendations help us meet our strategic priorities?**

- 3.1 The Council's priority for Community Development states that "The active involvement of communities is essential for the future development and improvement of the district." In order to work towards this priority, as a Council, we need to understand our communities and this is a primary focus of the Joint Diversity Working Party.

### **4. Key issues**

- 4.1 Both Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury have Diversity Groups:
- Forest Heath – a Diversity Officer Working Group which invites Members on an ad hoc basis.
  - St Edmundsbury – a Diversity Group which is an Officer/Member Working Party established under Overview & Scrutiny. The Portfolio Holder also attends by invitation.
- 4.2 At its meeting on 21 November 2012 St Edmundsbury Borough Council Cabinet considered a report recommending the establishment of a Cabinet appointed Diversity Working Party, operating across both authorities. Cabinet agreed the recommendation that "the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be asked to disband its Diversity Group with effect from May 2013, to allow Cabinet to form a new Joint Diversity Working Party as part of its next annual review of working parties."
- 4.3 The rationale for the establishment of a joint working party was that the work involved with equality and diversity is common or relevant to both Councils and these links are likely to become even stronger through shared services and joint teams are created. The proposed arrangements will avoid duplication of work.
- 4.4 Proposed Terms of Reference including membership recommendations have been developed and are attached for consideration as Appendix A. As highlighted in the Terms of Reference the Working Party would include four councillors; two councillors from each Council one of whom may be a Cabinet member.
- 4.5 As the Diversity Officer Working Group at Forest Heath is not a formally constituted Working Group, the establishment of a Cabinet appointed Joint Diversity Working Party requires approval by Cabinet so that Members may be appointed to the Working Party at the Annual General Meeting in May.
- 4.6 Members are therefore invited to recommend the establishment of the Joint Diversity Working Party and agree the Terms of Reference in Appendix A.

### **5. Other options considered**

- 5.1 Retention of the current arrangements, although this was discounted for the reasons given in 4.3.

## 6. Community impact

### 6.1 Crime and disorder impact *(including Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998)*

6.1.1 Not applicable.

### 6.2 Diversity and equality impact *(including the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment)*

6.2.1 The establishment of this Working Party will enable the development and implementation of a common approach in tackling diversity and equality issues in West Suffolk.

### 6.3 Sustainability impact *(including completing a Sustainability Impact Assessment)*

6.3.1 Not applicable.

### 6.4 Other impact *(any other impacts affecting this report)*

6.4.1 Not applicable.

## 7. Consultation *(what consultation has been undertaken, and what were the outcomes?)*

7.1 The Portfolio Holder from each authority has been consulted and supports this proposal.

## 8. Financial and resource implications *(including asset management implications)*

8.1 There will be cost and time benefits of considering common issues affecting both councils jointly, rather than at two separate meetings, and developing joint policies and procedures as appropriate.

## 9. Risk/opportunity assessment *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

<b>Risk area</b>	<b>Inherent level of risk (before controls)</b>	<b>Controls</b>	<b>Residual risk (after controls)</b>
There is duplication of effort on common equality and diversity issues affecting both councils	High	Establish a Joint Diversity Working Party, which allows member and officer time to be spent more effectively.	Low
The specific issues facing each district are obscured by the common approach	Low	Such issues will still be considered and local variations and amendments to policy and procedure can be made as necessary.	Low

## **10. Legal and policy implications**

- 10.1 In order for the Joint Working Party to be established a number of steps need to be undertaken at each Council.
- 10.2 At Forest Heath District Council; following consideration of this report at Cabinet, the Working Party will need to be formally established at the Annual General Meeting of Council on 8 May 2013. Members will also need to be appointed to this Working Party at that meeting.
- 10.3 At St Edmundsbury Borough Council; the existing Diversity Working Party will need to be dissolved by Overview and Scrutiny at its meeting on 24 April 2013. Members will need to be appointed to the new Working Party through the Amalgamated Working Group Report which is due to be considered by Cabinet on 25 May 2013.
- 10.4 The establishment of the Working Party will assist the Councils in the delivery of their duties under the Equalities Act 2010.

## **11. Ward(s) affected**

- 11.1 All.

## **12. Background papers**

- 12.1 None.

## **13. Documents attached**

- 13.1 Appendix A - Joint Diversity Working Party - Terms of Reference