

## **Briefing Note for the Forward Plan Select Committee on Equalities Impact of Finance Modernisation Project**

**SERVICE AREA:** Finance

### **Report Title:- Briefing Note on Equalities Impact on Finance Modernisation Project**

At the Forward Plan Select Committee meeting on 24 September 2009, it was agreed that a briefing note would be presented to update the committee as to whether there has been any impact on equality from the Finance Modernisation project.

A consultation period is currently underway with staff to consider the proposed new structures arising from the Finance Modernisation project. A draft Impact Needs / Requirement Assessment form has been completed and the key initial findings are set out below. However, it should be noted that this is very much an ongoing process, and that we will continue to monitor the equality impact of the proposals over the next few months.

The INRA's initial finding is that the Finance Modernisation project is consistent with the comprehensive equality policy, as the changes that finance will deliver through implementing the transformation programme will not only improve the efficiency of the service provision, it will ensure greater consistency in the delivery of the service, better information, lower costs and it will also significantly improve the customer experience.

Throughout the project lifecycle the Project Team have followed relevant council policies including Managing Change and Recruitment and Selection. By following corporate policy and guidelines, equalities considerations are automatically integrated into the proposed changes. For example, recruitment and selection policies, procedures, guidance and training specifically reference equality and diversity issues, including discrimination and relevant legislation. Selection panel members are required to attend recruitment training which includes equality and diversity before participating in the selection process.

A stakeholder assessment of customer needs has been carried out as part of the project, and a communications plan is in place to communicate with the various customer groups to ensure that all staff and partner organisations are aware of the changes and its impact on customers, and that they are able to provide adequate information in response to customer enquiries. There are 4 key customer groups that will be affected by the proposed changes:

#### **Finance Staff**

The role of Finance Staff across the authority will be changing quite significantly. Following the restructure some remaining Finance staff will be put into new teams, some will have to relocate and most will have completely new jobs.

A number of existing finance staff have flexible working arrangements in their existing roles. Staff will need to reapply for these flexible working initiatives when they move into their new teams/roles. There is a possibility that this will have an adverse impact

on staff with caring responsibilities or staff with young children, particularly in the event where their applications for flexible working maybe rejected.

A disproportionate number of women have been ringfenced to jobs in the new structure as opposed to being assimilated even though they make a greater percentage of the workforce, and a greater percentage of staff who work in finance. This is due to the fact that most of the assimilated jobs are in the specialist finance team and are at higher grades. Most of these posts have traditionally being held by men.

The draft INRA recommends that wherever existing flexible working arrangements and/or contracts exist, these should be considered in the new structure. If flexible patterns can be maintained, particularly where staff have care responsibilities for children or adults, then these should be enabled and encouraged. Flexible working patterns and arrangements should be discussed with affected post holders prior to the start of new contract arrangements.

#### **Service Areas/Internal Customers**

Internal customers will be directly impacted, as a result of the introduction of new income and payment processes. Internal customers that carry out finance related activities will receive the relevant training and communications to prepare them for the change.

#### **External Customers**

External customers will be impacted by the new income and payment processes. This will be communicated to customers via letter, email and the internet. The new processes include additional payment methods which enable additional accessibility and access to customers needing to make a payment to the Council.

Although there is no evidence to suggest an adverse impact on a particular group, special provisions will need to be made to ensure that vulnerable customers and hard to reach groups (elderly, disabled, customers with limited English and customers with learning difficulties) not only receive information about the proposed changes but received the information via a medium that is accessible and preferred by them.

#### **External suppliers**

External suppliers will be affected as a result of changes to the payment process. This will be communicated to the suppliers via letter and emails. The changes should benefit the suppliers by ensuring that Brent make prompt payments and resolve supplier queries quickly and efficiently. Arguably, this could most benefit smaller businesses, which probably include a large percentage of ethnic minority and/or women owners.

#### **Recommendations**

As the modernisation process will take place over a number of stages, the impact on equalities will continue to be monitored. It is recommended that the new service should regularly monitor the take-up and non-take up of its services as required by the council's equality scheme. This will help to widen and strengthen awareness of the introduction of new processes and to reduce the possibility of some diversity groups being adversely impacted on.

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