

4 STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no immediate staffing implications arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 Responsibility for housing strategy lies with the Director of Housing and falls within the powers delegated to him pursuant to the Council's Constitution. The Director of Housing nevertheless seeks the Executive's approval for the development of the strategy as set out in the body of this report. Responsibility for formulating housing diversity strategy has not been reserved to Full Council or excluded from the remit of the Executive.

- 5.2 While there is no legal requirement for the Council to have a housing diversity strategy the Council does have a duty under section 71 of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 ("the 2000 Act") to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful; racial discrimination and provide equality of opportunity and good race relations in carrying out its functions. An effective diversity strategy will assist in discharging this duty.

- 5.3 Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 states that:

A best value authority (which includes a local authority) must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

An effective housing diversity strategy will also assist in discharging this duty.

- 5.4 The Council adopted a Race Equality Scheme in compliance with its legal duties and the statutory Code of Practice issues by the CRE under the 2000 Act on 17th April 2002. An effective housing diversity strategy will inform and be informed by that Scheme and the Corporate Equality Plan.

6. DETAIL

- 6.1 It may be stating the obvious to say that Brent 's housing policies and strategies need to specifically address the needs of our diverse community and, in particular, the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups. Although there is a great deal of activity that is directly relevant in this area, the Council has not so far attempted to formulate a specific strategic approach to the many issues arising out of diversity. There are a number of reasons why it is now especially important that this gap should be filled.

6.2 Although there is no legal requirement for the Council to produce a strategy to address BME issues specifically in relation to housing, it would clearly be good practice to do so in Brent. A number of other factors are also significant, including:

- The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000
- Recommendations of the Lawrence Enquiry
- Compliance with CRE Codes of Practice in employment, in rented and non-rented housing
- Housing Investment Programme Guidance
- Audit Commission Performance Indicators on BME issues
- Housing Corporation guidance
- Best Value
- The ODPM's Action Plan – *Addressing the Housing Needs of BME People*
- Report of the Race and Housing Inquiry

6.3 To date, very few authorities have produced effective BME/Diversity Strategies. Those that do exist are often limited in scope, for example concentrating on partnership working with housing associations on lettings and development issues and not covering all tenures. Officers consider that limiting the scope of the strategy in this way risks undermining its objectives. The aim therefore is that a Strategy for Brent should cover all tenures and all housing related activity, in line with the wider Housing Strategy. It can justifiably be argued that there should be no need for a separate document on BME issues, since these should be an integral part of the main Housing Strategy. In the longer term, one aim of the Strategy will be to ensure that it is fully integrated and “mainstreamed”, which would be expected in the light of the Council's section 71 duties and its Race Equality Scheme, but there are cogent reasons for the production of a distinct document at this stage. First, the wider Housing Strategy is structured in a particular way owing to the requirements of the HIP process and does not lend itself to effective coverage of the issues. Second, producing a separate document will provide better focus for consultation and involvement of stakeholders and clarify the importance of the issues, providing a specific focus for further engagement with stakeholders and the development of work in relevant areas.

6.4 The key to a successful strategy will be the extent to which it engages partners and key stakeholders. The aim therefore is to ensure that the strategy is focussed on action and delivery and is accessible, relevant and “user-friendly”. Above all, it should be recognised that, especially during its first year, it should be a dynamic and evolving document that will be subject to change as issues evolve and clarify and consultation continues. It should be noted particularly that, although initial consultation will be as wide as possible, the development of the Strategy will be the subject of ongoing consultation, monitoring and review.

- 6.5 The initial consultation process will be led by the Policy and Research Team and will seek to engage as widely as possible with staff and managers within the Council, external agencies in the statutory and voluntary sector and, in particular, with representative BME organisations. Although consultation will use a traditional approach with many stakeholders, for example by simply seeking comments on the draft, it is recognised that this will not always be appropriate. The process will therefore also involve meetings and focus groups and presentations at relevant fora over the months of May and June, with a view to producing a final draft by the beginning of July. Recognising that any time-limited consultation process has limitations and that the Strategy will need to adapt and evolve in response to developments over the coming months (see paragraph 5.6) consultation, discussion and updating will continue over the course of the year.
- 6.6 In particular, the Strategy will be kept under review in light of key developments during 2003/04, including:
- Development of the Race Equality Scheme
 - Publication of further detailed census information
 - Publication of the results of the Housing Need and Stock Condition Survey
 - Developments at government level such as the Housing Bill and changes to the HIP process
 - Ongoing consultation
 - Outcomes of the Best Value Review of the Strategic Housing Function
 - Outcomes of the Homelessness Review and development of the Homelessness Strategy
 - Implementation of the new private sector renewal regime
- 6.7 The majority of West London boroughs are in the process of developing similar strategies. Given the importance of regional and sub-regional joint working, the seven boroughs will work together over 2003/04 to co-ordinate their approaches and identify common issues and projects with a view to incorporating diversity issues into the West London Housing Strategy.
- 6.8 It is intended that the Strategy should be formally launched during Respect Week, since this will provide a relevant focus. Detailed arrangements will be agreed by the Director of Housing.

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