

EQUALITY POLICY STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES 2016-2020

Legal and Democratic Advisory Committee - 14 April 2016

Report of Chief Executive

Status: For Decision

Also considered by: Cabinet - 21 April 2016

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: A document setting out our equality policy statement and objectives for 2016-2020 has been prepared and is being presented for approval. Public authorities are required to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years. Our equality policy statement and objectives document reflects priorities identified from a Members' Equality Action Plan workshop.

This report supports the Council's promise to provide value for money.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Anna Firth

Contact Officers Lee Banks, Ext 7161 and Sarah Lavallie Ext 7201.

Recommendation to Legal and Democratic Advisory Committee:

To recommend to Cabinet that the Equality Policy Statement and Objectives for 2016-2020 are adopted.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

The Equality Policy Statement and Objectives for 2016-2020 are adopted.

Reason for recommendation: To comply with our obligations under the Equality Act (2010), based on Members' priorities.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The approval of an equality policy statement and objectives is within the Council's policy framework and is a matter for Cabinet. We have a strong record of ensuring our services are responsive to the needs of our residents and customers, whilst taking a proportionate response to implementing equalities legislation.
- 2 The Equality Act (2010) sets out a 'Public Sector Equality Duty' which requires public authorities to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate

discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their day to day work - in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

- 3 As part of the duty, public authorities are required to prepare and publish one or more objectives and review these at least every four years. Public authorities are also required to publish information to demonstrate how they are complying with the duty.

Progress 2012-2016

- 4 In response to the introduction of the Public Sector Equality Duty, in 2012 we published the West Kent Equality Partnership Aims and Commitments for 2012-16. These were developed in partnership with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Examples of progress, since 2012, are provided below.
- 5 As a community leader we have:
 - Supported Dementia Friendly Communities, training more than 150 staff to be dementia friends;
 - Renewed the Sevenoaks Armed Forces Community Covenant; and
 - Provided family fun days with almost 2,000 attendances by young people.
- 6 As a service provider we have:
 - Carried out reviews of our polling places and made changes to improve access; and
 - We have designed easy read guidance for housing options and for Sevenoaks Switch and Save to allow residents to compare energy tariffs.
- 7 As an employer we have maintained a low gender pay gap between male and female employees and regularly reviewed and assessed our policies to ensure they are implemented fairly.

Equality Policy Statement and Objectives 2016-2020

- 8 We continue to take a proportionate approach to responding to our duties under the Equality Act (2010), reflecting the demographics of our communities and within current resource constraints. It has become clear that the West Kent Equality Partnership Aims and Commitments no longer support robust reporting of outcomes for each individual authority. Each authority is now preparing their own objectives, to replace the West Kent Equality Aims and Commitments.
- 9 Public authorities are required to consider what they can do to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. The Equality Act (2010) sets out the nine protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status,

pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation. In setting our objectives, we are permitted to adopt a proportionate approach and as such, a workshop with Members' was held to consider priorities in relation to each of the protected characteristics

- 10 There are five proposed equality objectives relating to our roles as a community leader, service provider and employer. The objectives relate to the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex (gender) to reflect the priorities identified in the Member workshop and broadly focus on catering for the needs an ageing population. Information gathered through the Community Plan consultation and Member workshop did not identify any specific measurable outcomes relating to the protected characteristics of gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief or sexual orientation. However, the Community Plan includes an equality and inclusion statement in relation to all protected characteristics and we will continue to consider the impact of our decisions on all relevant protected characteristics.
- 11 In addition to the proposed objectives, we will continue to monitor the services we provide and keep projects we take under review to determine if further equality objectives need to be set. This will be done through the Council's Equalities Monitoring Group and as part of annual progress reviews.
- 12 Members are asked to approve the Equality Policy Statement and Objectives document at Appendix A which sets out the objectives proposed for 2016-2020.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

- 13 All public authorities are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010. If we do not publish equality objectives we will not be able to demonstrate what steps we are taking to tackle the inequalities faced by our residents and action may be taken against the Council by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- 14 Adoption of a policy statement and objectives will ensure we focus our resources on tackling inequalities within the context of our local priorities and demographics of our population. The Equality Policy Statement and Objectives document can be reviewed annually, in line with annual performance reporting, to amend or add any objectives as required and to reflect any changes in local priorities.

Key Implications

Financial

- 15 Understanding the needs of people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010) will assist the Council in allocating resources to areas or services where it is considered to be a greater priority.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

- 16 The Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010. Failure to do so may result in the Council not being able to demonstrate what steps it is taking to tackle inequalities and action being taken by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

Equality Assessment

- 17 Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. This report sets our objectives for addressing key areas of discrimination and disadvantage over the next four years.

Community Impact and Outcomes

- 18 The equality objectives are intended to have a positive impact on our communities and people who use our services. Outcomes will be reported on annually.

Conclusions

- 19 This report sets out our priorities for addressing key areas of discrimination and disadvantage over the next four years and demonstrates our compliance with the Equality Act (2010).

Appendices

Appendix A - Equality Policy Statement and Objectives 2016-2020.

Background Papers:

None.

Dr. Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive