

EQUALITY ACTION PLAN

Legal and Democratic Advisory Committee - 19 June 2017

Report of	Chief Executive
Status:	For Consideration
Key Decision:	No

Executive Summary: Public authorities are required to prepare and publish equality objectives at least every four years. The Council's current equality policy statement and objectives for 2016-2020, which reflects priorities identified from a Members' Equality Action Plan workshop, was adopted by Cabinet in April 2016. This report provides a summary of progress against the actions set out in the policy over the last year and seeks Members views on priorities for the coming year.

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

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Anna Firth

Contact Officers Lee Banks, Ext 7161.

Recommendations to Legal and Democratic Advisory Committee:

- (a) Note the progress made in 2016-17 as set out from paragraph 10; and
 - (b) Advise officers on the priorities for action for 2017-18 based on the aims and objectives set out in the Council's Equality Policy Statement and Objectives.
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Reason for recommendation: To comply with our obligations under the Equality Act (2010), based on Members' priorities.

Introduction and Background

- 1 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.
- 2 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.

- 3 The approval of an equality policy statement and objectives is within the Council's policy framework and is a matter for Cabinet. The Council has a strong record of ensuring its services are responsive to the needs of residents and customers, whilst taking a proportionate response to implementing equalities legislation. The Council's current equality policy statement and objectives for 2016-2020, which reflects priorities identified from a Members' Equality Action Plan workshop, was adopted by Cabinet in April 2016.

Equality Policy Statement and Objectives 2016-2020

- 4 The Council continues to take a proportionate approach to responding to its duties under the Equality Act (2010), reflecting the demographics of its communities and within current resource constraints.
- 5 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, disability¹, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) and sexual orientation.
- 6 There Council's Equality Policy Statement sets out five equality objectives relating to its 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 a Member workshop and broadly focus on catering for the needs an ageing population.
- 7 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.
- 8 In addition to the proposed objectives, the Council has continued to monitor the services it provides and keeps projects under review to determine if further equality objectives need to be set. During 2016/17 this was done through the Council's Equalities Monitoring Group and as part of annual progress reviews.
- 9 The Equality Policy Statement and Objectives 2016-2020 is attached at Appendix A for Members information.

¹ You're disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

Progress 2016-2017

- 10 In response to the Equality Policy Statement and Objectives 2016-2020 published in April last year the Council set out an action plan to deliver on its objectives. Examples of progress over the last year, are provided below.
- 11 As a community leader we have:
- Supported Dementia Friendly Communities, training more than 150 staff to be dementia friends; been recognised with a Dementia Friendly Business Award and hosted our first community running event to raise awareness and funds to support work towards a dementia friendly Sevenoaks District;
 - Made grant awards totalling £153k to support organisations that provide services across the District supporting activities including inclusion and access for vulnerable and elderly people, community transport, schemes to improve mental health, domestic abuse support services, sports (including disability, elderly and young people) and youth schemes;
 - Through the local plan process gathered an evidence base and reviewed policy to ensure appropriate accommodation for gypsy and traveller accommodation;
 - Completed a housing need study to form the evidence base for the Council's new Housing Strategy that will be delivered in mid 2017;
 - Progressed projects to complete a new and modern sheltered housing complex which will provide apartments for older people and a new housing facility for people with learning disabilities;
 - Continued to provide for health walks across from eight locations across the District; and
 - Provided family fun days in locations across the District with almost 2,000 attendances by young people.
- 12 As a service provider we have:
- Provided disabled facilities grants to the value of £500k, supporting people to adapt their homes and live more independently;
 - Begun a pilot scheme to extend our HERO and disabled facilities grant services to a local hospital to minimise the effects of bed-blocking and helping people to return to their homes more quickly;
 - Made adaptations in the reception area of the Argyle Road offices in accordance with the Council's commitment to be Dementia Friendly;
 - Taken measures within our taxi licensing policy to improve the proportion of licensed vehicles that are accessible to people with disabilities;

- Made improvements to our polling stations for disabled people and for people who have visual impairments;
- Reviewed our local council tax support scheme, ensuring protections remain for those in most need and increased the level of support provided through discretionary housing payments; and
- Launched a new Council website which has ensured all online content has been reviewed, provided new online services and significantly reduced the use of PDF documents which are not accessible to all users.

13 As an employer we have:

- Reviewed our policies, including disciplinary and flexible working, and assessed them to ensure and assessed they are implemented consistently and fairly;
- Implemented a Volunteering Policy for staff; and
- Begun the process of gathering data to ensure the Council is compliant with the Government’s Gender Pay Gap Reporting regulations.

Actions for 2017-2018

14 The Council is determined to continue to meet the objectives it has set out in its Equality Policy and Objectives. To this end it is important that there is clarity about the actions we will take and information and data we will collect in the coming year. This may include reviewing, amending or adding objectives to reflect any change in local priorities since the Policy was adopted in April last year.

15 In 2017-18 the Council is seeking to:

- Complete a review of its polling places;
- Deliver a new Housing Strategy and West Kent Homelessness Strategy;
- Make substantial progress in preparing its local plan;
- Further review the local council tax support scheme;
- Continue to improve and develop new online services for its newly delivered website; and
- Continue to work with colleagues and the Accessibility Group to improve access to Council information and services.

16 Members views are sought on there priorities for the Council to address in its equality action plan in the coming year.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

- 17 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.
- 18 Adoption of a policy statement and objectives ensures 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

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

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

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

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

This report sets out the progress the Council has made in delivering actions against its Equality Policy and Objectives during 2016-17 and sets out some of the Council's priorities for addressing areas of discrimination and disadvantage over the year, to demonstrate compliance with the Equality Act (2010).

Appendices

Appendix A - Equality Policy Statement and Objectives 2016-2020

Background Papers:

None

**Dr. Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive**