

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 JANUARY 2018

EQUALITY POLICY AND OBJECTIVES

Report by Ben Threadgold, Policy and Performance Service Manager

Introduction

1. The Equality Act 2010 created the Public Sector Equality Duty, the broad purpose of which is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities.
2. One of the specific responsibilities of the Duty is the publication of an Equality Policy including a set of specific and measurable Equality Objectives, at least every four years.
3. The Council's current Equality Policy is now due for review.
4. The new Policy focuses on how we are meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty in relation to the protected characteristics. The Policy gives examples of good practice and show the good work already being done.
5. The Policy is also more challenging, identifying gaps in our performance, and both more ambitious and more specific in our objectives than previously versions.
6. The Policy ties in with work being done on the new Corporate Plan and current work-streams ensuring principles of equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in our day to day business.
7. A cross-directorate task group (consisting of 18 people across directorates) completed the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government which involves self-assessment in five performance areas against a scale of 'Developing', 'Achieving' and 'Excellent'. Evidence was presented in support of each area and we assessed our performance as follows:

Knowing your communities	Achieving
Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment	Achieving
Involving your communities	Achieving
Responsive services and customer care	Developing
A skilled and committed workforce	Achieving

8. The self-assessment has identified areas within each performance area where we are working well to meet our Duty, and examples are given in the policy.
9. We also identified areas for improvement highlighted by the self-assessment, analysis of the data collected in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Equality in Employment Report, and engagement with staff.
10. Those areas for improvement have formed the basis of a set of Equality Objectives that we will commit to achieve over the next 4 years. An Action Plan will also be included in the Policy which will set out how we will do this.

Key Issues

11. The proposed new set of Objectives are as follows:

Objective 1 – Introduce equality monitoring at the customer service centre and complaints teams to gain a better understanding of our customer base.

Objective 2 - Introduce evaluation mechanisms across a wider range of services so we can better identify the views and needs of our communities.

Objective 3 - Improve access to our public website and other digital services we provide to make sure all residents are able to access the information they need online.

Objective 4 - Consider accessibility as part of our review of how make better use of our buildings and assets.

Objective 5 - Improve the quality and timeliness of the data we hold and how effectively we use it to inform service planning and design that responds to the differing needs of people who share protected characteristics.

Objective 6 – Improve communications with our commissioned services about the equality duty, protected characteristics, and their role in supporting these Objectives.

Objective 7 - Improve the balance of gender in services where a group are under-represented.

Objective 8 - Increase the representation of BAME employees in the workforce.

Objective 9 - Increase the number of people under 25 employed in the Council's workforce

Objective 10 - Improve the policies, practices and mechanisms in place to ensure disabled employees can fully participate, develop and be successful in the workplace.

12. Service areas will provide specific actions they will commit to take to meet the Objectives and they will be included in an Action Plan (a template is currently on page 16 of the Policy).
13. The Action Plan will be completed after the public consultation to ensure full consideration can be given to any feedback received from that exercise. The actions will link to other key strategic plans.
14. **The Committee is asked to comment on the draft Equality Objectives.**
15. The proposed governance arrangements are included on page 19 of the Policy
16. Our evidence gathering has highlighted a need for more robust governance on the Equality Objectives to further ensure that equality, inclusion and diversity is embedded within service planning and delivery across all our work-streams.
17. It is proposed that:
 - the Cabinet Member for Local Communities will have overall responsibility for ensuring that we achieve our Equality Objectives, and that they are reviewed and updated to reflect progress and any changing or emerging priorities;
 - each Equality Objective will be owned by a senior officer, to oversee the implementation of the agreed actions; and
 - a working group will monitor the action plan as a whole, produce quarterly updates for the County Leadership Team and Cabinet, and produce an annual report referencing progress and performance against our proposed actions (linked to our wider quarterly performance reporting).
18. **The Committee is invited to comment on the proposed new governance arrangements.**
19. It is proposed that consultation with the public, partner organisations, voluntary organisations and specific targeted groups such as My Life, My Choice and Age UK, will begin in January 2018 for a period of 6 weeks. This will focus on gaining feedback on our proposed objectives.
20. A questionnaire will be the primary tool for collecting feedback, asking for comment on the areas on which we have focussed our objectives.
21. We also plan to hold focus group sessions and meetings with specific organisations to ensure we gather as many views as possible, through the most appropriate and effective routes. This may include going out to community groups in their different settings. It will also ensure feedback is gathered from specific groups covered by the protected characteristics.

22. **The committee is asked to comment on the proposed approach for consultation with the public, partner organisations, stakeholders and voluntary sector organisations.**

Financial and Staff Implications

23. None directly, as actions within the plan will be embedded within work being taken within service areas and consultation costs will be met from within existing resources.

Equality Implications

24. This is the Equality Policy and the aim of our approach is to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those that do not, and to foster good relations between groups with and without protected characteristics.
25. This Policy will therefore have positive implications for equality

RECOMMENDATION

26. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to comment on the three key issues as detailed in the report:**
- a) the draft Equality Objectives;**
 - b) the proposed new governance arrangements; and**
 - c) the proposed approach for consultation with the public, partner organisations, stakeholders and voluntary sector organisations.**

Ben Threadgold
Policy and Performance Service Manager

Background papers: none

Contact Officer: Amy Allen, Policy Officer, amy.allen@oxfordshire.gov.uk
December 2017