

Report to: Governance Select Committee

Date of meeting: 1 December 2015



Portfolio: Governance and Development Management (Councillor J. Philip)

Subject: Equality Objectives 2012-2016 – Q2 progress 2015/16

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (a) That the Select Committee review progress against the Council's Equality Objectives (2012-2016) up until September 2015, and other work to meet its statutory equality duties;
- (b) that the Select Committee note the draft equality objectives for 2016-2020, and bring forward any comments and suggestions for their development and delivery.

Executive Summary:

The Equality Act 2010 placed a number of responsibilities on the Council, including a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to have due regard to equality in the exercise of its functions, to the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant characteristic and those who do not. Further specific responsibilities were introduced requiring the adoption of equality objectives to improve equality for service users and employees, to carry out equality analysis, and to publish equality information.

In March 2012, the Cabinet agreed four equality objectives for the four years from 2012 to 2016, designed to help the Council meet the aims of the PSED. This report reflects progress against these objectives at the mid-point of their last year.

As the current set of equality objectives comes to the end of its lifetime in March 2016, work is underway to identify a new set of objectives for 2016-2020.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

In view of the corporate importance of the achievement of these objectives, and ensuring compliance with the PSED, progress is reported to the Select Committee on a six monthly basis.

Other Options for Action:

None. Failure to monitor and review progress against the Equality Objectives and to take corrective action where necessary, could have negative implications for judgements made about the Council, and might mean that opportunities for improvement are lost.

Report:

Equality Objectives

1. The Equality Act 2010 places an obligation on the Council to produce equality objectives to improve equality for service users and employees and therefore in April 2012 the Council adopted four equality objectives for the four years until March 2016.
2. The objectives are supported by an Action Plan with actions designed to secure the achievement of each of the objectives, spread across the four year time span. Many of the actions can only be achieved incrementally or are dependent upon other actions. The Action Plan is intended to be fluid to reflect changes in service delivery and the development of the work to achieve greater fairness, and is therefore subject to amendment and addition.
3. A schedule detailing progress against individual actions is attached as Appendix 1 to this report. In reporting progress against the objectives, the following 'status' indicators have been applied to individual actions:

Achieved (Green) - specific actions have been completed or relevant targets achieved;

On-Target (Green) – specific actions will be completed or achieve in accordance with targets;

Under Control (Amber) - specific actions have not been completed or achieved in accordance with relevant targets, although completion/achievement is likely to be secured by revised target date;

Behind Schedule (Red) - specific actions have not been completed or achieved in accordance with relevant targets;

Pending (Grey) – specific deliverables or actions have not been completed or achieved, as they rely on the prior completion of other actions or external factors outside the Council's control

4. Equality Objectives are focused on key areas where improvement in relation to equality has been identified, as follows:
 - Objective 1: Equality information
 - Objective 2: Equality ownership
 - Objective 3: Engagement
 - Objective 4: Equality in workforce development

The position with regard to the delivery of the objectives at the end of September 2015 is shown in the attached appendix. Whilst some updates are outstanding at the time of Q2 reporting, the actions to deliver the objectives are largely completed. It is considered by the Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG) that the potential to progress a fully accessible meeting room for the district through this action plan (actions 3.06 a) and b)), has been exhausted. It is recommended this is progressed via the Transformation Programme. The Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG) will continue to monitor progress against the action plan, and progress actions where possible.

Equality analysis

5. The Council is required to understand the impact of its activities on people with protected characteristics, and this understanding is captured via the process of equality analysis. Therefore Council functions are screened as to their relevance to equality and relevant functions are subject to equality analysis every three years or sooner if the function undergoes significant change. The current programme of analysis is now in its second year and information gained through analysis is used to develop services or to identify measures to mitigate negative impact.

Equality Information Publication

6. Equality Information must be published annually, with the latest report being published in September 2015.

Equality Objectives 2016-2020

7. The current set of equality objectives will reach the end of their lifetime in March 2016, and as reported to the Committee in July, the CEWG has commenced the process of identifying the equality objectives to take the authority forward from 2016-2020. Directorates have been consulted to capture ideas and suggestions, which have in turn been developed as follows:

Objective 1: To integrate the Council's public sector equality duty in our partnership working.

8. The Council's PSED is relevant across the full range of its activity including its work through partnerships. The duty also applies to its public sector partners and it may be the Council can access good practice or share work to comply with the duty. Work to ensure our partnerships take forward the PSED, is seen as a key area where work still has to be done.

Objective 2: To apply robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management frameworks.

9. Procurement by local authorities is identified by the government as a key area for the development of equality and where there is the potential to improve the lives of people. Whilst it is evident there is some consideration of equality in our procurement practices, procurement has not been a focus for equality work to date, and integration is required if the duty is to be met. Work would be undertaken to explore the current degree of integration, and improve understanding of requirements and best practice in this area.

Objective 3: To improve and develop equality in our business activities and project working.

10. This includes projects and reviews, and along with Objectives 1 and 2, seeks to build on progress already made in integrating equality into service planning and delivery, and extend it into our wider activities, and at an earlier stage of our investigation and research.

Objective 4: To develop our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans and services.

11. Employee understanding of Council requirements remains important. Whilst some progress has been made in the course of the current set of objectives, the CEWG considers there is the potential to refine and refocus training for employees to reflect the Council's current position in its equality journey.

12. Progress in relation to the achievement of the equality objectives and other equality requirements, together with progress in relation to the development of a new set of equality objectives, was considered by Management Board in November 2015.

13. The Select Committee is requested to review current progress against the equality objectives for 2012-2016, and other work to meet the Council's statutory equality duties; and to note the draft equality objectives for 2016-2020, and bring forward any comments or suggestions for their development and delivery.

Resource Implications:

Resource requirements for actions to achieve specific equality objectives will be identified by the responsible service director/chief officer and reflected in the budget for the year. Compliance with statutory equality duties can currently be met from within existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

There are no legal or governance implications arising from the recommendations of this report. Relevant implications arising from actions to achieve specific equality objectives will be identified by the responsible service director/chief officer.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising from the recommendations of this report in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the corporate Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues within the district. Relevant implications arising from actions to achieve specific equality objectives will be identified by the responsible service director/chief officer.

Consultation Undertaken:

Equality Objectives 2016-2020:

- Consultation brief for directorates
- Management Board in July and November 2015

Background Papers:

Equality Objectives 2016-2020:

- Draft Action Plan
- Research paper to CEWG

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

There are no risk management issues arising from the recommendations of this report. Relevant issues arising from actions to achieve specific equality objectives will be identified by the responsible service director/chief officer.

Equality:

The direction of focus for activities to deliver the Council's equality duties through its dual role as service provider and employer, has the potential to impact on a wide range of people. The focus for the current set of objectives has been to build capability, knowledge and ownership. This second set of objectives is looking to widen that focus to include our partnership activities; to build in due regard at an early stage of strategic planning and investigation; and to exploit the potential to deliver equality through our extensive procurement activity. By progress building and moving to a 'wider and deeper' focus, equality can be better integrated and provide the potential for greater and more wide ranging benefit for customers, residents and employees.