

Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14th September 2021

Portfolio: Corporate Services (Cllr D Sunger)

Subject: Equality Policy

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- 1) That the Select Committee review the Equality & Inclusion Policy and the Equality Objectives it contains; and**
- 2) That the Select Committee provide a view on whether to undertake public consultation on the Equality Objectives.**

Report:

1. Epping Forest District Council is committed to advancing equality and inclusion for all. The Council's new Equality & Inclusion Policy demonstrates our commitment to this and our responsibility to our communities and our workforce. The Equality Objectives contained in the Policy set out we will deliver this commitment, recognising the need to continuously improve and build on our past achievements to ensure excellent equality practice.
2. The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 require public authorities to set and publish at least one Equality Objective every four years to demonstrate how they will eliminate discrimination and advance equality. They also require public authorities to publish information to show their compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty at least annually. Typically, this takes the form of an annual Equality Report or Statement. In addition to the Equality Act, the Council has a statutory duty to reduce health inequalities many of which are associated with protected characteristics under the Equality Act.
3. In our 2020 Equality Statement we made the following commitments:
 - In 2021 we will review our Equality Objectives and produce a new Equality Policy
 - Our Equality Objectives will be supported by a framework for measuring performance and evaluating the effectiveness of our work on equality.
 - Each Service Plan will describe how it is working to improve equality and will report on the delivery of equality.
 - We will review our Equalities Impact Assessment to focus more on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes. This supports our commitment to ensure that these are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage to any protected groups from participation.
 - We will engage and learn from our communities about the challenges they face and ensure that policy development, innovation and growth are inclusive and put people on

- an equal footing.
 - We will continue to promote the District as a place where diversity of background and thought are valued.
4. Our new Equality Objectives build on our previous objectives. They focus on what we will do to advance equality and how we will do it. The following Equality Objectives (2021-2025) are recommended to Cabinet.
- **Equality Objective 1:** To develop, and deliver in partnership, a District-level approach to growth and recovery that builds, and can demonstrate, an Epping Forest that works for all.
 - **Equality Objective 2:** To drive improvement in service delivery through the use of equality data and data on socio-economic deprivation.
 - **Equality Objective 3:** To develop a research and consultation strategy to understand the needs and experiences of our communities with a clear pathway or process to embed their knowledge and experience into service design, development and delivery.
 - **Equality Objective 4:** To understand, and evidence, the impact of our workforce initiatives on improving equality.

These Equality Objectives will enable EFDC to:

- Better understand our diverse communities and the relationship between protected characteristics under the Equality Act and socio-economic deprivation.
- Embed this understanding into policy and practice, particularly in relation to growth and recovery.
- Demonstrate inclusive leadership, partnership and a clear organisational commitment to be a leader in equality and inclusion.
- Develop services that are relevant and responsive to people's experiences and the challenges they face in a digital world.
- Provide better evidence of the impact of our workforce initiatives

5. The Equality Policy sets out our commitment to whole council approach to equality and inclusion and actions to ensure continuous improvement. They include adopting the LGA Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG). They also include identifying Officer and Elected Member leads to provide the linkages between the Equality Policy and other policies and strategies e.g., The Health and Wellbeing Strategy, national strategies and Service Plan objectives.

To deliver the Equality Policy the following actions will be undertaken

- 2021 - Establish the foundation to deliver our Equality Objectives, building on our current commitments.
- 2021 - Collect baseline measures to inform and set targets, integrate existing Equality Impact Assessments into Corporate Impact Assessment Framework.
- 2021 – Develop Equality Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
- 2021 - Review Equalities Impact Assessment to focus on the role of analysis in understanding the impact of our policies, practices, events and decision-making processes.
- 2022 - Ensure higher standards being met in all areas. Address challenges.
- 2023 - Model good practice across the organisation. Self-assessment against EFLG
- 2024/5 - Review Equality Objectives, produce new Equality Policy

Reason for decision

To enable the Select Committee to review the Equality Policy and Equality Objectives as part of the Council's commitment to advancing equality and demonstrating this across all its policies, programmes and services.

Options considered and rejected

Not applicable

Resource implications:

Commitments made in the Equality Policy will be met within existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The adoption of the Equality Policy and Equality Objectives will ensure that the Council meets its legal requirements under the Equality Act (2010) and the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011). The Policy has been reviewed by the Shared Head of Legal Services & Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer & Information Governance Officer. Suggestions have been made and incorporated.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the Safer, Cleaner and Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues.

Inequality and sustainability interact and there are different kinds of inequality many of which overlap. This Policy makes the case for better understanding the relationship between protected characteristics under the Equality Act and the socio-economic factors that produce inequalities of wealth. These, in turn, are associated with differences in environmental impact and the carbon footprint of individuals. The data from the actions in this Policy will be used to ensure that inequality and environmental issues are not considered in isolation and that growth is both fair and green.

Consultation Undertaken:

Consultation has been undertaken with Service Managers, the Leadership Team and Service Directors. Responses were overwhelmingly positive. No substantive amendments were proposed to the Equality Policy or Equality Objectives and minor comments have been incorporated.

There is no statutory duty to consult on the production or publication of Equality Objectives. Many councils do, however, decide to consult to ensure full transparency and provide an opportunity for community engagement.

Background Papers:

None

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The setting and publication of Equality Objectives will ensure that the Council is not in breach of its statutory duty and that mitigation is not required.

Equality

The Equality Objectives will help EFDC address the causes of inequality and promote equality and inclusion across its functions. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken for Cabinet which shows that the Equality Objectives will have positive impacts for all protected groups.