

Report to the Council

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 27 March 2012

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ricki Gadsby
(Leisure and Wellbeing)

1. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 2013-2016

Recommending:

That the Council's Equality Objectives for 2013 to 2016 be adopted.

1. The Equality Act 2010 introduced requirements for the adoption of equality objectives by all public authorities, and replaced previous requirements for the publication of equality schemes. Equality objectives must be adopted by 6 April 2012, and at least every four years thereafter.
2. The Council's proposed equality objectives have been designed to help meet the general equality duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. The objectives have been developed from appropriate evidence and a range of data and information, including the results of consultation exercises and surveys, the views of groups and individuals that the Council currently engages with in respect of equality matters, impact assessment and equality analysis, and the report of an assessment against the Equality Framework For Local Government in 2010. The proposed equality objectives are:
 - (a) To develop existing customer and employee equality intelligence gathering systems and the use of intelligence in service planning

This objective is intended to ensure that relevant and appropriate equality information is gathered efficiently, to identify key equality gaps and inform corporate policy and strategy, to enable the Council to assess whether there are equality trends or patterns that should be investigated. Equality information is required to be used in decision making and service planning and provision, and this process must be transparent and provide evidence that equality information has been used to make decisions and plan and deliver services. Equality data and information is captured on a proportionate basis relevant to individual services and functions.

- (b) To ensure ownership of equality by those within the Council in a position to shape services

This objective is intended to help ensure that equality is understood and appropriately championed by Members and officers in the development and delivery of services. The Council's political and executive leadership should be committed to improving equality outcomes, fostering good relations and respecting human rights. High-level commitment is key to meeting the Council's statutory responsibility to remove disadvantage, meet the needs of people with a protected characteristic, and encourage people to get involved in public life.

- (c) To develop engagement across all protected equality groups

This objective is intended to help advance equality of opportunity and ensure equality in service provision. Equality legislation requires that public authorities appropriately engage with residents and service users to meet the general equality duty. The Council should use community engagement effectively to plan services and prioritise decisions, and engagement opportunities should be inclusive, accessible, and participative.

- (d) To ensure that the Council's culture, systems and working practices allow for the development of a management profile representative of its workforce as a whole

This objective is intended to help secure equality of opportunity in the Council's role as an employer, and to embed a culture of equality throughout the authority. The Council should ensure that the effects of its employment procedures are assessed, and that action is taken to mitigate any adverse impact identified and to promote equality of opportunity, including innovative and holistic initiatives to improve outcomes and address potential barriers.

3. Consideration is being given to whether it would be appropriate for the Council to also adopt an equality objective in respect of its commissioning and procurement (purchasing) activities, as this has been highlighted as a key area by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This issue may therefore be subject of a future report to the Cabinet.
4. Equality schemes may still be published, and the Council's new Equality Scheme has been designed to reflect the provisions of the Equality Act, and to communicate its objectives and arrangements for securing equality. The Equality Scheme is an outwardly focused document covering the four year span of the equality objectives, and will not be reviewed on an interim basis. Ongoing equality progress and achievements will be reflected in the annual publication of equality information, also required by the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Scheme is attached as an appendix.
5. We recommend as set out at the commencement of this report.