

Report to Cabinet

Report reference: C-054-2017/18

Date of meeting: 10 April 2018



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Equality Objectives 2018-22

Responsible Officer: Monika Chwiedz (01992 562076)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions required:

(1) That the Council's Equality Objectives and Action Plan for 2018-2022 be agreed.

Executive Summary:

The Council is required to publish equality objectives every four years to take forward its public sector equality duty. This duty requires that we proactively consider how discrimination can be addressed through the work that we do, and also whether we can advance equality of opportunity and encourage good relations between different protected groups. The setting of objectives provides a focus on the outcomes to be achieved during the next four years.

New objectives have been developed to take the Council up to April 2022, and because the objectives must be specific and measurable, an action plan has been developed to deliver them.

Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the adoption of the proposed equality objectives and action plan for 2018-2022.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

The setting of equality objectives every four years is required of public bodies under the Equality Act 2010. It is therefore, a key statutory duty that the objectives are set and published, together with the ongoing progress to achieve them.

Other Options for Action:

Cabinet could decide not to adopt one or more of the proposed objectives, or to adopt alternative objectives. However there is no alternative option to the setting and publishing of one or more equality objective for the period 2018-2022.

Report:

1. In April 2016 the Council published its set of equality objectives designed to provide focus for the Council's work to deliver its public sector equality duty, and thereby advance equality for service users and employees. The duty requires public authorities to at all times have due regard to the following three aims:

- (i) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation;
- (ii) to advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and

- (iii) to foster good relations between different groups;

and the objectives set met one or more of these aims and were designed to help the Council to fulfill that duty. This set of four objectives targeted:

- (a) the public sector equality duty relevance across the full range of its activity including its work through partnerships;
- (b) procurement and contract management;
- (c) development of our capacity, staff training to ensure understanding of the Council's requirements; and
- (d) equality in our business activities.

2. An action plan to deliver the objectives was adopted, which, as a working document, was subject to further development as the work progressed over its four year lifespan. The lifespan of these objectives comes to an end in March 2020, however considerable progress has been made and the objectives have been largely achieved. The outstanding actions will be reported to the Governance Select Committee on 27th March 2018.

3. In July 2017 the Corporate Equalities Working Group (CEWG) met and mutually agreed that the 2016-20 objectives focus very much inwards on EFDC operations. It was felt that our Equality Plan would benefit from a more holistic approach focusing on the culture and behaviours we would like to improve throughout EFDC. A staff survey was carried out to address concerns and things that matter the most to the staff and to consult with colleagues on what they feel our vision and objectives should be. Community survey was also conducted however attracted only 8 responses. The survey was conducted face to face through some of the community forums and a link to the survey was also sent to relevant groups online.

4. CEWG has been engaged in the development of a new set of objectives to take the Council forward until March 2022. Whilst the number of objectives the Council must adopt is not prescribed in the legislation, like all equality work, the number and focus must be reasonable and proportionate to the size of the organisation and its functions.

5. This new set of objectives is designed to address the challenges still faced by the Council to embed equality into all its activities and seeks to build upon the progress already achieved. Evidence to support the identification of themes for objectives was scoped, together with feedback from CEWG representatives and a review of work to date. The draft action plan, attached at Appendix A, also seeks to help to deliver the Councils Key Objectives and Transformation Programme, where relevant.

6. An action plan to deliver the objectives is a working document and subject to further development as the work progress over its four year lifespan so further actions can be added whilst the plan is operational. Any changes to the deadlines to deliver these actions or provision of any additional actions to help deliver the objectives are subject to a consultation with the Leader of the Council and Head of Transformation.

7. The CEWG has consulted with directorates in relation to a proposal of these objectives. Four objectives are proposed and are set out below together with a brief outline of the reasons for their proposal.

Objective 1: To apply robust equality requirements in commissioning, procurement and contract management

8. In order to ensure compliance with its statutory obligations, the Council needs to ensure that procurement and equality are integrated for contract category 3 or higher. It may be that the Council can access and share good practice to comply with the duty. Smaller

businesses may not always have the resources to develop their equality procedures the same way larger companies do. We will work to ensure small businesses are fairly treated when bidding for the Council's contracts and also check each Contractor's approach to equality to ensure they comply with the requirement of the Equality Act 2010.

Objective 2: We will recruit and retain a diverse workforce, developing our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans

9. Employee understanding of Council requirements remains important. Whilst some progress has been made in the course of the current set of objectives, the staff survey results considers there is the potential to improve access to information and refocus training for employees to reflect the Council's current position. Staff survey was conducted to address employees' concerns and identify their needs in relation to equality duty.

Objective 3: We will take into account the equality impacts of our emerging proposals and seek to mitigate any adverse impacts where possible

10. This includes projects and reviews and will look to build on progress already made in integrating equality into Transformation Programme and decision making, and extend it into our wider activities. In order to maintain a coordinated approach to equality, forms and documentation will be reviewed, updated and shared.

Objective 4: We will embed equalities in all we do and make it part of business as usual

11. Although we have had a very limited number of responses from the community survey (8), we want to ensure equality is integrated into our everyday practices. We will provide an overview on our work over the last year and commit to ensure that equality is not an add-on, but is part of our business as usual practice.

12. The Council is subject to a further duty to publish equality information annually to show progress against the public sector equality duty, and progress against the equality objectives action plan forms part of this information. We are also required to understand the impact of our services and activities on people from the protected groups and a separate programme of analysis runs alongside and will inform the work contained in this action plan.

13. Whilst there is no obligation to produce an equality scheme, CEWG considers it a useful way of communicating the Council's intentions and approach to this area of work. It is intended that subsequent to the adoption of a new set of equality objectives, the existing scheme will be reviewed and updated to reflect them.

14. The Cabinet is requested to consider and agree the proposed equality objectives for 2018-2022, and action plan to deliver them subject to the views of Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This report will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 17 April 2018.

Resource Implications:

The achievement of the Council's corporate equality responsibilities in relation to the proposed objectives can be met from existing resources.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The adoption of equality objectives to progress the public sector equality duty is in compliance with The Equality Act 2010.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None relating to this report. Relevant implications arising from actions to deliver specific equality objectives for 2018-22, will be identified by the responsible service director.

Consultation Undertaken:

Directorates at key stages of objective identification and development
Corporate Equalities Working Group July 2017 and 1 December 2017
Procurement Team November 2017 and March 2018

Background Papers:

Equality Objectives 2016-2020

Risk Management:

None arising from this report. Relevant risk management issues arising from actions to achieve specific equality objectives will be identified by the responsible service director.