

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 19 April 2016



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

Subject: Equality Objectives 2016-2020

Responsible Officer: Barbara Copson (01992 564042)

Democratic Services Officer: A. Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That, subject to the concurrence of the Cabinet, the Council's Equality Objectives and Action Plan for 2016-2020, 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.

In 2012 the Council adopted equality objectives which reach the end of their lifespan in March 2016. New objectives have been developed to take the Council up to April 2020, and because the objectives must be specific and measurable, an action plan has been developed to deliver them.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to agree the proposed equality objectives and action plan for 2016-2020.

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:

There is no alternative option to the setting and publishing of one or more equality objective for the period 2016-2020, however different equality objectives could be adopted.

Report:

1. In March 2012 the Council published its first 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:
 - 1) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - 2) to advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and

- 3) 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 first set of four objectives targeted:

- 1) equality intelligence gathering and the use of that intelligence in service planning;
- 2) the development of equality ownership;
- 3) improving engagement activities; and
- 4) work to allow for the development of a balanced workforce profile.

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 progress of work to deliver the action plan has been coordinated by the Corporate Equality Working Group (CEWG), chaired by the Director of Governance, and reported to Management Board and the Governance Select Committee at 6 monthly intervals. The lifespan of these objectives ended in March 2016, and over their lifespan, considerable progress has been made and the objectives have been largely achieved.

2. Over the last year the CEWG has been engaged in the development of a new set of objectives to take the Council forward until March 2020. 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.
3. 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 Council's Key Objectives and Transformation Programme, where relevant.
4. The CEWG has consulted with directorates at all stages of the development of the objectives and action plan, and Management Board and Governance Select Committee at key stages of their development. Procurement Steering Group has been consulted in relation to objective 2. Four objectives are proposed and are set out below together with a brief outline of the reasons for their proposal:

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

The public sector equality duty 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.

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

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 fully met.

Objective 3: To develop our capacity so that our employees have the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver our plans

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.

Objective 4: To improve and develop equality in our business activities

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.

5. The Objectives are supported by other work to deliver the Council's equality duties including an annual information report, equality analysis to understand the impact of our services on people from the different protected groups, and an equality policy and scheme.
6. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is requested to agree the proposed equality objectives for 2016-2020 and the action plan to deliver them. This report will also be considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 7 April 2016. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be brought to the attention of the Cabinet at its meeting in June 2016.

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 2016-20, will be identified by the responsible service director.

Consultation Undertaken:

Directorates at key stages of objective identification and development
Management Board 13 May 2015, 4 November 2015, 2 March 2016
Governance Select Committee 7 July 2015, 1 December 2015, 5 April 2016
Procurement Steering Group 4 February 2016

Background Papers:

Equality Objectives 2012-16
Management Board reports 2 March 2016, 13 May 2015 and 4 November 2015

Impact Assessments:

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