

Cheshire East Council

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	7 th February 2017
Report of:	Peter Bates
Subject/Title:	Equality and Diversity Strategy 2017-2020
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Paul Findlow (Corporate), Cllr Paul Bates (service users)

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Council recognises that promoting equality and inclusion will improve public services for everyone. We want Cheshire East to be an area of equal opportunity, where everyone has a fair chance and people from all backgrounds take part in community life.
- 1.2. Our aim is to make equality an integral part of the way the Council works by putting it at the centre of everything we do. We are committed to celebrating diversity and promoting equality – as an employer, in the services we provide, in partnerships, and in the decisions we make.
- 1.3. In accordance with Regulation 3 of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 (“the Regulations”), the Council must prepare and publish at least one equality objective once every four years.
- 1.4. In April 2012 the Council identified and published four equality objectives that served to address our main priorities for improving our understanding of and response to inequalities across all our services.
- 1.5. Over the last four years progress has been made in some areas; however it is recognised that the Council still has further work to do to ensure that equality and diversity is embedded within the organisation and that it is seen as the responsibility of all.
- 1.6. In October 2016 an Equality and Diversity Strategy Group was established, this is chaired by the Chief Operating Officer and has responsibility for overseeing the development of an Equality and Diversity Strategy which is to include the Council’s agreed equality objectives.
- 1.7. Five equality objectives have been developed, and formal public and staff consultation on these took place between the 6th December 2016 and the 16th January 2017.

- 1.8. This report presents The Equality and Diversity Strategy and for the period 2017-2020. This strategy replaces the Council's Equality Inclusion Policy (2012) and provides a framework to help us achieve our equality vision, by improving our equality performance and by responding to the needs of all the people of Cheshire East.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. Cabinet are asked to approve and adopt the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2017-2020 for Cheshire East as the Council's framework for achieving our equality and diversity vision, (Appendix 1).

- 2.2. Cabinet are asked to support the five equality objectives presented within the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2017-2020:

- *Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of our communities*
- *Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively*
- *Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to ensure equality of representation at all levels across the organisation*
- *Demonstrate a positive culture with strong leadership and organisational commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the council and amongst partners.*
- *Ensure that the Council's services are responsive to different needs and treat service users with dignity and respect.*

- 2.2.1. That the Chief Operating Officer of the Council reports annually to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny on progress made against delivering these objectives, and that this report is published annually on the council's website.

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1. To ensure compliance with The Equality Act 2010 a refresh and review of the Equality objectives is required, therefore no other options have been considered.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1. Public bodies subject to the general equality duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.
- 4.2. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to produce and review, every 4 years, a set of equality objectives.
 - 4.3. Each of the five equality objectives presented in the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2017-2020 make a direct contribution to supporting the delivery of our 'Ambition for All' vision and corporate plan.

5. Background/Chronology

5.1. The Equality Act 2010 places a requirement on public bodies to demonstrate compliance with each part of the PSED. This requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct which is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

These are often referred to as the three aims of the general equality duty.

5.2. Guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggests that equality objectives should be viewed as part of an organisation's business planning processes, to ensure they are aligned to business priorities, and are an integral part of business performance.

5.3. A workshop was held on the 1st December 2016, to consider the progress made on the current equality objectives. Based on this exercise, five new objectives were proposed.

5.4. On the 6th December the Council launched a public and staff consultation on the five equality objectives.

2.1. The consultation was promoted and publicised in a number of ways, and a log held to evidence our approach. Promotion activities included:

- Feature articles in the internal "Team Voice"
- Council website and Centranet
- A Twitter and social media "campaign"
- Email to raise awareness of the consultation and requests to share wider with:
 - Town and Parish clerks
 - Leisure Centres

- Communities and Partnerships newsletter and general email distribution list (over 300 individuals from strategic partnerships and the VCF sector)
- South Cheshire Multi Cultural Forum
- Services and teams within Cheshire East

5.5. There were 270 responses received to consultation including surveys completed online and paper based. 80.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the objectives represent what the Council needs to focus upon.

5.6. A detailed consultation report is available upon request and will be published on the Council's website. A brief overview of the respondents to the survey is as follows:

- 65.61% of respondents are residents of Cheshire East, 28% are staff of the Council;
- 69.2% of respondents are female, 27% male;
- 92.45% of respondents identified themselves as White British;
- 9% of respondents reported that their day to day activities are limited because of a health problem or disability;
- The largest age group for respondents is 45-54years (38.87%);
- 55.34% respondents are Christian, with 40% stating no religious belief or prefer not to say;
- 90.42% of respondents described their sexual orientation as heterosexual, 4.6% bisexual or gay/lesbian;

5.7. Based on the feedback receive the final five equality objectives for approval are:

- Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of our communities
- Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively
- Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to ensure equality of representation at all levels across the organisation
- Demonstrate a positive culture with strong leadership and organisational commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the council and amongst partners.
- Ensure that the Council's services are responsive to different needs and treat service users with dignity and respect.

- 5.8. An overarching Equality and Diversity Strategy has been developed and is shown in Appendix 1.
- 5.9. The Equality and Diversity Strategy group will be responsible for ensuring that the strategy is implemented, monitored, reviewed and updated, and will provide an annual report on progress.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. All wards and all members

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- 7.1.1. The implementation of the Equality and Diversity Strategy and the five equality objectives will ensure that the Council embeds the equality agenda throughout all of its policies.

7.2. Legal Implications

- 7.2.1. Completing equality impact assessments and working towards the achievement of the Equality and Diversity objectives will ensure that the Council is meeting the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty 2011.

7.3. Financial Implications

- 7.3.1. A non recurrent budget of £20,000 has been allocated to support the delivery of the Equality and Diversity delivery plan for the period of 2017/18. Costs will be identified and prioritised as part of the delivery plan development.
- 7.3.2. Service areas will be responsible for identifying and addressing inequalities and promoting diversity. The resource implications of equality action plans should be considered by service areas as part of their budget setting process.
- 7.3.3. Resources will be allocated from the corporate training budget to provide equalities training for staff and members.

7.4. Equality Implications

- 7.4.1. The Equality and Diversity delivery plan will be implemented:
 - All reports to members will include an equality impact assessment, where appropriate.
 - Staff and members will receive appropriate equality and diversity training.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

7.5.1. The Council is strongly committed to ensuring that our rural communities are not disadvantaged by any of our policies or changes in service delivery. The Equality and Diversity Strategy builds on the work to date to “Rural Proof” our decision making and embed “Rural Proofing” within our equality impact assessments.

7.6. Human Resources Implications

7.6.1. The Council has taken the approach that equality and diversity should be mainstreamed and embedded within all service areas and should not be the sole responsibility of one officer.

7.6.2. The Equality and Diversity Strategy and its supporting delivery plan will be delivered within existing resources, and a number of “Equality Champions” have been identified.

7.6.3. There will a requirement for staff and members to undergo training to support the delivery plan. This will include training on the legislative requirements, consultation and equality impact assessment.

7.7. Public Health Implications

7.7.1. Reducing inequalities is at the heart of what the refreshed equality objectives and Equality and Diversity Strategy aims to achieve. As reported in the Marmot review (2010), health inequalities are as a result of social and economic inequalities across the population. By ensuring that the Council proactively delivers on its Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council continues to support and address any health inequalities in Cheshire East.

7.8. Implications for Children and Young People

7.8.1. The refreshed equality objectives and overarching strategy will drive further improvements in how we engage and consult with our children and young people, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged on the basis of any protected characteristic they may have.

8. Risk Management

8.1. Non compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and an inability to demonstrate significant evidenced progress to the recommendations yields a high risk to the Council re:

- Judicial review leading to key council decisions/policies/budget settings to be overturned.
- Significant financial penalties and legal costs.

- Reputational risk.
- Ineffectively targeted services (not knowing the protected characteristic needs of employees, customers and communities of Cheshire East). As a result, best value and cost-effectiveness is not achieved.
- The potential for the Council to be seen to endorse a discriminatory culture.
- A less diverse workforce could lead to a less creative workforce.

9. Access to Information/Bibliography

- 9.1. [Equality and Inclusion Policy \(PDF, 388KB\)](#)
- 9.2. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/technical-guidance-public-sector-equality-duty-england>

10. Contact Information

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