

11. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SCHEME 2016-20

REPORT OF: Lynne Standing, Head of Service for Housing, Environmental Health & Building Control
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Council
23 March 2016

Purpose of Report

1. Further to its consideration and endorsement by the Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community at its meeting on 2 March 2016, to seek Council's approval to the revised Equality and Diversity Scheme to cover the period 2016-20, and to advise Council of progress against our equality objectives over the past year.

Recommendations

2. **Council is requested to approve the Equality and Diversity Scheme 2016-20 attached at Appendix 1.**
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Background

3. Mid Sussex is fortunate in being a generally affluent area, whose residents in the main enjoy good health and above average life expectancy. However, anyone can be discriminated against and suffer disadvantage which affects their quality of life. There are pockets of deprivation, where poor skills and low skills combine to limit residents' opportunities. There are health inequalities with for example, Gypsies and Travellers and those in deprived areas having substantially lower life expectancy than the norm. Some residents may find it difficult to access the services that they need, or to participate in decisions that affect them, due to disability, language difficulties, poor skills, living in a rural area or a range of other factors. The Council has a part to play in tackling these inequalities through its roles in service delivery, employment and as a community leader.
4. The Council's existing Single Equality and Diversity Scheme 2013-16 was adopted in March 2013 and was a reflection of the Equality Act 2010, which brought together a number of pieces of legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act, Race Relations Act and the Disability Discrimination Act.
5. The Equality Act 2010 also brought in a number of new responsibilities for councils including a new public sector equality duty and a requirement to promote equality between those with "protected characteristics" and others. The public sector equality duty means that the Council must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The nine protected characteristics are:

- age
 - sex
 - race
 - disability
 - religion or belief
 - pregnancy and maternity
 - sexual orientation
 - marriage and civil partnership
 - gender reassignment.
6. The Act introduced specific duties for public bodies to publish Equality Objectives and equality data to show their compliance with the duty. The Council's 5 Equality Objectives were adopted in March 2012 and formed a key part of the current Scheme 2013-16. The Equality Act requires the Objectives to be reviewed at least every four years. It is proposed to amend these objectives retaining their essence, but shortening them where possible and reducing their number to four. Details of the proposed amendments are included in section three of the scheme, with the proposed revised set of objectives reading as follows:
1. We will show leadership and commitment in promoting equality and diversity.
 2. We will consider the needs of individuals across the whole community, and especially those groups protected by the Equality Act 2010, when we plan and deliver our services.
 3. We will seek to prevent discrimination and to promote good relations between different sectors of our community.
 4. As an employer, we will seek to promote equality and respect for diversity in the workplace by providing appropriate policies, training and support.
7. Equality Data has also been published, comprising an Equalities Profile with information about the protected groups, which was updated in 2014. We also produce an annual staff monitoring report.
8. The Equality Act requires the Council to demonstrate on an annual basis how it is meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty. We do this through the publication of an Annual Report updating on progress to the Equality and Diversity Scheme. The proposed Annual Report for 2015 is included at Appendix A to the Scheme. It has been agreed previously that the Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community should be authorised to agree this report, which they did at their meeting on 9 February 2016.

Equality and Diversity Scheme 2013-16

9. The proposed new Equality and Diversity Scheme is included at Appendix 1 and sets out:
- The legislative background, including the implications of the Equalities Act 2010.
 - An assessment of the issues faced by each of the protected groups in Mid Sussex and examples of the measures that the Council is taking to meet their needs.
 - The Council's proposed amended Equality Objectives and examples of some of the actions that we intend to take for their achievement.

- A section setting out responsibility for implementation of the scheme at Member and Chief Officer level. This also addresses monitoring arrangements, with the proposal that Annual Reports on progress with the scheme continue to be considered by the Leisure and Community Scrutiny Committee.
10. Appendix A to the scheme is the Progress Report for 2015, which was endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community on 2 March 2016. Good progress was made last year in meeting our responsibilities and in delivering tangible improvements for our residents. One important measure that we took last year was to provide diversity training to members to help equip them to deal with equality issues.
 11. In addition to the Progress Report, the Scrutiny Committee also considered the Scheme itself and agreed to recommend its approval by Council. It has also been shared with key equality related partner organisations, such as the East Grinstead Access Group, Mid Sussex Older People's Council, Youth Voice and the Diversity Forum.

Policy Context

12. The delivery of the Council's Equality Objectives will make a major contribution to the priorities set out in the Sustainable Communities Strategy and Corporate Plan, and to the Council's aim to achieve Opportunity and Quality of Life for All.

Other Options Considered

13. The report provides a new Equality and Diversity Scheme, which is designed to set out a programme to meet the Council's statutory requirements under the Equality Act. No other practicable options were identified.

Financial Implications

14. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Risk Management Implications

15. The new Equality and Diversity Scheme and Progress Report helps the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting the public sector duty under the Equality Act and to avoid the risks associated with non-compliance.

Equalities and customer service implications

16. Customer service and ensuring equality of access are of continuing importance, especially with regard to meeting the needs of those who are vulnerable or may find it difficult to access our services. The Equality and Diversity Scheme sets out steps to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and refers to the Council's programme of impact assessments, which are designed to promote equality and to identify and address the barriers that may prevent people accessing its services.

Other material implications

17. None.

Background Papers

None.