

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY PROGRESS REPORT 2017

REPORT OF: HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Community, Housing and Planning
Date of meeting 21 March 2018

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides Members with an update on progress in 2017 against the Council's Equality and Diversity Scheme 2016 – 2020.

Recommendations

- 2. The Scrutiny Committee is requested to endorse the Council's approach to meeting its duties under the Equality Act, as evidenced by the Equality and Diversity Progress Report 2017 included at Appendix 1.**
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Background

3. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the Council to publish an annual report setting out progress to their Equality and Diversity Scheme. A new scheme for 2016 – 2020 was approved by Council on 23 March 2016 and it was agreed that annual reports on progress should be provided to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.
4. The Council's Equality and Diversity Scheme has been shaped by the Equality Act 2010, which introduced a number of responsibilities for councils, including a public sector equality duty and a requirement to promote equality of opportunity 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

The Act also introduced specific duties for public bodies to publish Equality Objectives and equality data to show their compliance with the duty.

4. The Council continues to mainstream its equalities work with our customer services activities, recognising that meeting the needs of individual customers for Council services is consistent with good equalities practice.
5. In addition to considering the needs of those with protected characteristics, our equalities work looks at disadvantage arising from income or skill level and by virtue of where they live.

Progress Report 2017

6. The Annual Report for 2017 is included at Appendix 1 and sets out progress against the Council's Equality Objectives. Particular areas of progress include:
 - the holding of the annual play day events in our main parks at Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath, which attracted over 2,000 local children and their families.
 - further progress with the dementia friendly Mid Sussex initiative to develop Dementia Friendly Communities in each of the three towns in the District.
 - targeting improvements to the health of vulnerable people through the work of the Health and Wellbeing Team and concessionary use of our leisure centres.
 - providing English conversation courses for members of the BME community with English as a second language.
 - further development of Silver Sunday in the District, which is intended to mitigate the problem of loneliness amongst older people. This comprised a main event held at East Grinstead and the Council supporting through its grants scheme the holding of a number of other events across Mid Sussex.
 - investment in our property assets and providing facilities with improved accessibility.
 - providing Heat for Health energy roadshows to provide local people with advice on support on how to keep their homes warm and save on energy bills.
 - continuing to use our Corporate Grants Scheme to provide for organisations that support vulnerable people, with the completion of a review of the scheme to ensure that the funding is well targeted.
7. The Annual Report provides examples of work that has been done over the past year to improve the lives of some of the most disadvantaged members of our community. It concludes that overall good progress has been made in meeting our duties and highlights further initiatives to be developed in the year ahead.
8. In addition to service improvement for those with protected characteristics, the progress report comprises information about the composition of the Council's staff with regard to age, ethnicity, disability and gender. This includes the Council's gender pay gap and related information, which is required to be published under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017.
9. Members are asked to consider the Annual Report and advise whether there are any areas of the Council's Equality and Diversity activity that require further emphasis.

Policy Context

10. The Annual Report demonstrates progress against the Council's Equality Objectives. The delivery of these objectives will make a major contribution to the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan.

Other Options Considered

11. The report updates on progress to the 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

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

Risk Management Implications

13. The Progress Report helps the Council to continue to demonstrate that it is meeting the public sector equalities duty under the Equality Act and to avoid the risks associated with non-compliance.

Equalities and Customer Services Implications

14. 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 report 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

15. None.

Background Papers

16. None.