

7. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY PROGRESS REPORT 2014

REPORT OF: Lynne Standing, Head of Housing, Environmental Health and Building Control
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community
Date of meeting 24 March 2015

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides Members with an update on progress in 2014 against the Council's Single Equalities and Diversity Scheme 2013-16.

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 Equalities and Diversity Progress Report 2014 included at Appendix 1.**
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Background

3. The Equality Act 2010 placed a duty on Council to publish an annual report setting out progress to their Equality and Diversity Scheme. A new scheme for 2013-16 was approved by Council in March 2013 and it was agreed that annual reports on progress should be provided to this 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.

5. The Council continues to adopt a proportionate approach to its equalities work, aiming to mainstream it with our customer services activities, recognising that meeting the needs of individual customers for Council services is consistent with good equalities practice.

Progress Report 2014

6. The Annual Report for 2014 is included at Appendix 1 and sets out progress against the Council's Equality Objectives. Particular areas of progress include:
 - development of our safeguarding procedures to cover adults at risk, as well as children and young people.
 - continuing to use our Grants Scheme to support community organisations and projects that assist vulnerable groups in the District.
 - improving our communications through a redesigned and more accessible Website and the greater use of social media.
 - implementing further staff training through mandatory courses on Equality and Diversity; Customer Service Standards and Safeguarding.
 - development of the Youth Voice initiative to improve engagement with young people in the District.
7. The Annual Report sets out 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 is being made in meeting our duties and highlights further initiatives to be developed in the year ahead.
8. 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

9. 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 Sustainable Communities Strategy and Corporate Plan, and to the Council's aim to achieve Opportunity and Quality of Life for All.

Other Options Considered

10. The report updates on progress to the Equalities 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

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

Risk Management Implications

12. 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

13. 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

None.

Background Papers

None.