

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY SCHEME 2020-24

REPORT OF: TOM CLARK, HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery
Date of meeting: 5th February 2020

Purpose of report

1. This report provides Members with a proposed Equality and Diversity Scheme 2020-24 for consultation and approval by Council. It also proposes that in approving the scheme, the Council adopts the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism.

Recommendations

2. **The Committee is requested to:**
 - 2.1 Consider the proposed Equality and Diversity Scheme 2020-24 for consultation attached at Appendix 1;
 - 2.2 Recommend to Council at the meeting on 1st April 2020 that the Equality and Diversity Scheme 2020-24 be adopted, subject to any comments or amendments following the consultation;
 - 2.3 Recommend to Council that in approving the scheme the Council also adopts the IHRA definition of antisemitism.
 - 2.4 To note the Equality and Diversity Report 2019 set out in Appendix A.
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Background

3. The Council's current Equality and Diversity Scheme 2016 – 20 was adopted in March 2016. This 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 Disability Discrimination Act. The Act also brought in a number of new 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 Act is now 10 years old and bedded into public life.
4. 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
5. In addition to the protected characteristics, the Council's equality and diversity activities address issues arising from residential location and income or skill level. It also covers supporting the needs of the armed forces community.

Equality and Diversity Scheme 2020-24

6. The Council's proposed new Equality and Diversity Scheme is included at Appendix 1 and sets out:
- The legislative background, including the implications of the Equality Act 2010.
 - The Council's Equality Objectives and examples of some of the action that we intend to take to support their achievement.
 - 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. Similar information is provided in respect of residential location; income or skill level; and the Armed Forces community.
 - A section focusing on the Council's Equality and Diversity responsibilities as an employer.
 - A section setting out responsibility for implementation of the scheme at Member and Chief Officer level and monitoring arrangements.
7. The Equality Act requires the Council to demonstrate on an annual basis how it is meeting the Public Sector Equality Duty. Appendix A to the Scheme comprises the 2019 Equality and Diversity Progress Report with information on the specific service improvements that have been delivered in the year. The new Scheme proposes that the Scrutiny Committee for Community, Customer Services and Service Delivery should continue to have responsibility for considering an annual progress report.

Equality Objectives

8. The Equality Act introduced specific duties for public bodies to publish Equality Objectives and equality data to show their compliance with the duty and for these to be reviewed at least every four years. The Council's Equality Objectives were originally adopted in March 2012 and revised in 2016. These four objectives have been retained in the new scheme and now make reference to support for the armed forces community, which the Council has decided to integrate with its equality and diversity work. The Council's proposed Equality Objectives read 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 staff policies, training and support, including assistance for former members of the armed forces.

IHRA Definition of Antisemitism

9. The Government has requested that all councils formally adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism and to use it on all appropriate occasions. This has already been adopted by over 200 councils and reads as follows:

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

10. The proposed new Equality and Diversity Scheme under Religion or Belief refers to the Council adopting the IHRA definition. The Alliance has issued guidelines on the manifestations of antisemitism, which are set out in appendix 2.

Consultation Arrangements

11. It is proposed that a 6-week consultation should take place on the new scheme through the Council’s website and contact with the main equality related groups in Mid Sussex that the Council works with. These include Age UK, Mid Sussex Older People’s Council, Mid Sussex Voluntary Action, Citizens Advice, Social Landlords, foodbanks, Town and Parish Councils. Comments received will be taken into account in the final version that is to be considered by Full Council on 1st April 2020. It is proposed that any minor changes to the scheme are agreed in consultation with the Chairman of this Scrutiny Committee prior to consideration at Full Council.

Policy Context

12. The delivery of the Council’s Equality Objectives will make a major contribution to the Council’s priorities set out in the Corporate Plan, especially effective and responsive services and strong and resilient communities.

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 Equality and Diversity Scheme and Progress Report helps the Council 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 service implications

16. The purpose of the scheme is to set out the Council's approach to delivering its duties under the Equality Act and ensuring access to its services.

Other material implications

17. None.

Background Papers

None