

Corporate Governance and Standards Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: n/a

Report of Managing Director

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## Annual review of the Equality Scheme action plan

### Executive Summary

The Equality Scheme and associated action plan were adopted by the Executive in January 2018. The Executive recommended that the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee should monitor the implementation of the actions in the action plan on an annual basis.

This report was due to be considered at the meeting scheduled for 26 March 2020, which was cancelled due to the COVID 19 lockdown.

### Recommendation to Corporate Governance and Standards Committee

To approve the updated equality action plan (linked to the Equality Scheme 2018 - 2021), as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

#### Reasons for Recommendation:

To assist the Council to meet its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and continue to provide a way to measure and evidence work undertaken in this area.

**Is the report (or part of it) exempt from publication? No**

### 1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To obtain approval of the updated equality action plan (linked to the Equality Scheme 2018 - 2021).

### 2. Strategic Priorities

2.1 The Equality Scheme and action plan contributes to our fundamental themes and priorities as follows:

Community – supporting more vulnerable and less advantaged people in our community

### **3. Background**

3.1 The Equality Scheme and associated action plan were revised and adopted in January 2018. The Equality Scheme sets out the Council's commitment to equality and diversity both as an employer and as a provider of public services. It incorporates our legal responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and states broadly how we intend to meet our obligations to the general and specific duties of the Act.

The general duty of the Equality Act sets out three main aims. As a public body, we must have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and of the conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The specific duties of the Act are:

- To publish equality information annually to demonstrate compliance with the general duty. This includes information relating to people with protected characteristics who are:
  - its employees, or
  - affected by its policies and practices e.g. service users.
- To prepare and publish at least one equality objective that we think we should achieve in order to meet any of the aims of the general duty. Our equality objectives are set out in the action plan.

3.2 A number of objectives set out in the action plan have been achieved in 2019 (see Appendix 1) and progress is being made on many others such as:

- A revised equality impact assessment (EIA) template and guidance has been introduced Council-wide. The form is simpler to complete and the guidance will ensure that impact is assessed at the appropriate time and is proportionate to the activity being assessed. Assessing impact on equality helps us to understand the effect of the Council's activities on people from protected groups and enables us to address any potential discrimination.
- We aim to ensure that our communications are accessible to protected groups. The Guidance on Alternative Forms of Communication document has been reviewed and updated on the Loop.
- We also aim to make our website accessible to protected groups and a full review has been carried out in line with the Web Content Accessibility

Guidance. The Web team have received training in website accessibility and have implemented a number of improvements to our website.

- A process has been agreed to identify any customer complaints that relate to equality, for example a complaint of unlawful discrimination. This will enable equality related complaints to be monitored and where appropriate, remedial action taken. No complaints were received in 2019.
- The Council carried out a benchmarking exercise of Director remuneration levels in 2019 and used E-PayCheck, a benchmarking package, to check the salaries of our job families against other local authorities.
- The workforce profile reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 have been approved and published on the website. The 2019 report will be completed by the end of March 2020. Housing Advice have published their annual report of equality information related to housing applications and lettings. These reports link directly to our obligations under the specific duty to publish equality information relating to our employees and service users.
- Claire Morris, Director of Finance, was appointed as the senior lead for equality and diversity in October 2018. This provides strategic direction and raises the profile of equality and diversity at a senior level.

3.3 Once approved by Corporate Governance and Standards Committee, the updated action plan will be published on the Council's website and intranet site.

#### **4. Consultations**

4.1 No formal consultation has been conducted as this is an annual review of the action plan and no changes have been made to the Equality Scheme (2018 – 2021).

#### **5. Equality and Diversity Implications**

5.1 Consideration of the impact on equality and diversity has already been set out by in the Equality Scheme and a separate equality impact assessment is therefore not necessary.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

6.1 There are no financial implications.

#### **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 As set out in section 3 of this report, the Council has legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010 including the Public Sector Equality Duty.

7.2 The Equality and Human Rights Commission is the regulatory body responsible for enforcing the Equality Act. Their role is to help organisations to achieve their responsibilities but ultimately they have enforcement powers, which range from

guidance to investigations and court action where organisations fail to meet their obligations.

## **8. Human Resource Implications**

- 8.1 Equality and diversity forms part of the remit of the HR Specialists so no specific additional resources are required to implement the Scheme. Completion of the action plan falls mainly to staff in Human Resources although some objectives overlap with existing projects and action plans where work is already underway and is not anticipated to create any additional demand for resources.

## **9. Summary of Options**

- 9.1 The options are to continue with the existing plan or approve the updated version.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 If the updated action plan is approved it will continue to:
- provide a means of recording and monitoring our progress and enable the development of new equality objectives
  - provide evidence that we are legally compliant
  - provide focus and direction for our work in this area
  - keep equality and diversity in the forefront of people's minds and help embed equality into our business planning and day to day activities.

## **11. Background Papers**

The Equality Scheme and current action plan are available upon request or can be viewed on our website <https://www.guildford.gov.uk/transparencydata>

## **12. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Updated action plan