

Corporate Governance and Standards Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: n/a

Report of Director of Resources

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Equality Scheme and Action Plan

Executive Summary

Under the Equality Act 2010 there are statutory obligations for organisations to have equality objectives and to adhere to the general and specific duties within the Act.

The key objectives of the scheme and action plan are:

- to demonstrate how the Council will meet our legal obligations set out in the Equality Act 2010
- to provide a structured and easy to understand equality framework
- to ensure that our workforce encourages equality, diversity, and inclusion to help prevent legal challenges arising from bullying, harassment, and discrimination

The Scheme itself is reviewed annually and updated every 3 years. The new scheme covers 2021 - 2024. The Action Plan is an organic document which is reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Group every quarter.

The workforce profile in Appendix 3 is for information and interest only. This document is updated and published on an annual basis to satisfy our statutory duty within the Equality Act 2010 to publish equality data annually.

Recommendation to Corporate Governance and Standards Committee

That the Committee approves the revised Equality Scheme and Action Plan shown respectively in Appendices 1 and 2 to this report.

Reasons for Recommendation:

To assist us in meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and provide a way to measure and evidence our work 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 revised Equality Scheme and the associated action plan.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 The Equality Scheme and action plan will contribute to our fundamental themes and priorities as follows:

Community - supporting older, more vulnerable, and less advantaged people in our community

3. Background

- 3.1 A workplace encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion can help:

- make it more successful
- keep employees happy and motivated
- prevent serious or legal issues arising, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination
- to better serve a diverse range of customers
- improve ideas and problem-solving
- attract and keep good staff

- 3.2 The Equality Scheme sets out our 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 them. Specific objectives are set out in the action plan and support these intentions.

- 3.3 The action plan has been drafted with the following aims in mind:

- to create simpler and more 'user-friendly' objectives
- to enable us to take stock of the equality and diversity work already being carried out and provide direction for the future
- to provide an opportunity to relaunch the Council's work in this area at a manageable and achievable level
- to demonstrate how we will meet our legal obligations set out in the Equality Act 2010.

- 3.4 Endorsement of the Scheme and action plan will re-affirm the Council's commitment to equality and diversity as well as highlighting its stance on key issues such as sexual and racial harassment.

- 3.5 The Scheme and action plan have been updated with the aim of making them easier to read and therefore more useful particularly to people who are unfamiliar with the subject. Objectives in the revised action plan are simpler, practical, and more achievable.

The actions will develop over a three-year period, progress will be reviewed annually, and the Scheme updated as necessary.

- 3.6 Once the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee approves the Scheme and action plan, they will be published on the Council's website and intranet site.

4. Consultations

- 4.1 No formal consultation has been conducted as the Scheme and action plan have been brought up to date rather than fundamentally changed.

5. Key risks

- 5.1 No risks have been identified as this is a policy update.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no financial implications. The equality and diversity forum members are made up of existing employees.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the regulatory body responsible for enforcing the Equality Act. They have a range of enforcement powers, which range from guidance to investigations and court action where organisations fail to meet their obligations.
- 7.2 It is not a legal requirement to have an equality scheme; however, there are obligations to have equality objectives and to adhere to the general and specific duties of the Equality Act. An equality scheme is the ideal medium to set out how the Council works to integrate equality and diversity considerations into its activities.

8. Human Resource Implications

- 8.1 Equality and diversity forms part of the remit of the Human Resource Specialists, so no specific additional resources are required to implement the Scheme. Completion of the action plan is not anticipated to create any additional demand for resources as this work forms a fundamental part of our duties.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 9.1 The Scheme and action plan have been updated rather than fundamentally changed and our consideration of equality and diversity has been clearly stated in the revised Scheme. A separate equality impact assessment is therefore not necessary.

10. Climate Change/Sustainability Implications

10.1 There are no climate change/sustainability implications

11. Summary of Options

Option 1

To approve the updated equality scheme and associated action plan – this is the recommended option.

Option 2

To not approve the updated equality scheme and associated action plan – this option carries some risk as it may result in the Council not adhering to the general and specific duties of the Equality Act. This may then result in an increase in discrimination claims (for which compensation is uncapped), potential reputational damage and potential court action by the EHRC (see para 7.1).

12. Conclusion

12.1 The Equality Scheme and Action Plan have been brought up to date in line with our duty under the Equality Act 2010. We have specific and general duties under the Act and we therefore need to evidence that we have a plan to address and adhere to these duties.

12.2 Having a diverse and inclusive workforce is fundamental to the success of any organisation. One of the aims of this Scheme is to help achieve this.

12.3 Our Resources Director chairs the E&D Group and senior management are committed to equality and diversity and ensuring that all staff and stakeholders are aware of key issues such as sexual and racial harassment.

12.3 Discrimination claims are uncapped in employment law and therefore it makes sense for the organisation to ensure that it takes all possible measures to protect its staff and itself from breaches of the Equality Act.

13. Background Papers

None

14. Appendices

Appendix 1: Revised Equality Scheme 2021-2024

Appendix 2: Action Plan 2021-2024

Appendix 3: Workforce profile 2020