

Corporate Governance and Standards Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: n/a

Report of Director of Resources

Author: Lucy Richards

Tel: 01483 444013

Email: [lucy.richards@guildford.gov.uk](mailto:lucy.richards@guildford.gov.uk)

Lead Councillor responsible: Nikki Nelson-Smith

Tel: 01483 568554

Email: [nikki.nelson-smith@guildford.gov.uk](mailto:nikki.nelson-smith@guildford.gov.uk)

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## Equality Scheme

### Executive Summary

The existing Equality Scheme (formerly named the Single Equality Scheme) and action plan were developed a number of years ago and consequently they now need refreshing.

A revised Scheme and action plan have been drafted with the following aims in mind:

- to create simpler and more 'user-friendly' documents
- to restate our legal obligations and how we intend to meet them
- 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.

Whilst it is not a legal requirement to have an equality scheme it enables us to summarise in one place the Council's commitment to equality and diversity and to demonstrate how we will meet our legal obligations set out in the Equality Act 2010.

### Recommendation to Corporate Governance and Standards Committee

That the Committee

- (1) commends to the Executive the adoption of the Equality Scheme and action plan shown respectively in Appendices 1 and 2 to this report; and
- (2) monitors the implementation of the actions in the action plan on an annual basis.

### Reasons for Recommendation:

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

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To obtain approval of the revised Equality Scheme (formerly known as the Single 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:

Our society – believing every person matters and concentrating on the needs of the less advantaged.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 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, which support these intentions.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 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<sup>1</sup> and those who do not
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.4 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.

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<sup>1</sup> The protected characteristics are gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, gender reassignment and marriage or civil partnership

- To prepare and publish at least one equality objective that we think we should achieve in order to meet the general duty. This should be done every four years and objectives must be specific and measurable.
- 3.5 The Scheme and action plan have been re-written 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 therefore more achievable. It incorporates other action plans already in place for existing projects such as the Time to Change Mental Health Pledge and the Disability Confident Employer scheme.
- 3.6 The actions will develop over a three-year period, progress will be reviewed annually by the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee and the Scheme updated as necessary.
- 3.7 One of the objectives in the plan is to create an equality and diversity forum made up of employees from across the Council with representatives from the protected characteristics. It is proposed that the HR Partner (Equalities) will chair the forum and its purpose will be to raise awareness of equality and diversity issues, provide a vital channel of communication with employees who have protected characteristics and to monitor progress against the action plan. Membership of the forum is not anticipated to be onerous or create additional work for its members. The HR Partner (Equalities) will provide updates to CMT regarding any significant issues and progress made against the action plan, with an annual report on this work being reported to this Committee.
- 3.8 Endorsement of the Scheme and action plan will reaffirm the Council's commitment to equality and diversity as well as highlighting its stance on key issues such as sexual and racial harassment.
- 3.9 Subject to the Executive's approval, the Scheme and action plan 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. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 5.1 HR Partner (Equalities) consideration of equality and diversity has been clearly stated in the revised Scheme and a separate equality impact assessment is therefore not necessary. In addition, the Scheme and action plan have been updated rather than changed fundamentally.

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

- 6.1 There are no financial implications. The equality and diversity forum members will comprise of existing employees who will act as a channel of communication to their colleagues.

## **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 Partner (Equalities) 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, as detailed previously, 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 keep the existing Scheme and action plan which as previously described needs refreshing or, to approve the revised versions of the Scheme and action plan.

## **10. Conclusion**

- 10.1 If the revised Scheme and action plan are approved it will ensure we have in place a robust and up to date statement of our commitment to equality and diversity. It will assist us to develop this area and ensure we are compliant with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## **11. Background Papers**

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

## **12. Appendices**

Appendix 1: Equality Scheme  
Appendix 2: Action plan