

Corporate Governance and Standards Committee Report

Ward(s) affected: n/a

Report of Director of Resources

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Equality Scheme Action Plan – Progress Update

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 three years. The current scheme covers 2021 - 2024. The Action Plan is an organic document which is reviewed by the Equality and Diversity Group every quarter and progress updated annually to CMT and to this Committee.

Recommendation to Committee

That the Committee approves the revised Equality Scheme Action Plan, as set out in Appendix 1 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 updated Equality Scheme Action Plan following revision and actions taken by the Equality and Diversity Group.

2. Strategic Priorities

- 2.1 The Equality Scheme and Action Plan 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 detailed action plan is attached in Appendix 1. Some key actions taken and updates under each heading of the plan include:

- **Leadership and corporate commitment**
 - Service Leaders training on how to complete equality impact assessments was carried out in March 2022.
 - 'How to' videos are being planned for the same subject for general cascading through the organisation
 - E&D KPIs have been added into the plan
- **Service delivery and customer care**
 - An accessibility audit was carried out in 2021-22 and our internet and intranet sites are currently being reviewed to ensure they meet the needs of protected groups. This work is ongoing and progressing well.
 - We are in the process of reviewing our status under the 'Disability Confident' scheme which will endorse our commitment to equality
- **Employment and training**
 - 'How to' videos are being planned through the Communications team on a variety of topics
- **Consultation and community development**
 - A diversity assessment of the housing register was carried out in 2022. The data indicates that those from ethnic minorities are accessing the housing register, housing advice and assistance. They are also successfully securing council accommodation. The additional data collected in respect to the other equality strands

indicates that there is some degree of diversity among our housing applicants.

- Since January 2022 our template committee reports now include a link to the updated equality impact assessment guidance and form and this document is now a mandatory part of the process.
- The Guildford Access Group will now be involved in all Council consultations.

- 3.3 Endorsement of the updated 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.
- 3.4 The actions will develop over a three-year period (2021 – 2024), progress will be reviewed annually by CMT and the plan and Scheme updated as necessary.
- 3.5 Once the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee approves updated action plan, it will be published on the Council's website and intranet site.

4. Consultations

- 4.1 No formal consultation has been conducted as this is a progress update of actions that the Equality and Diversity Group have taken to date.

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 were updated in 2021 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 and comment, if applicable, on the progress of the action plan – this is the recommended option.

Option 2

To not approve the progress on the equality 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 were brought up to date in 2021 in line with our duty under the Equality Act 2010 and covers the period 2021 - 2024. The Action Plan is reviewed and updated regularly whilst the Equality Scheme remains unchanged at this time. 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.
- 12.3 Our Resources Director chairs the Equality and Diversity 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: Action Plan 2021-2024