

UNRESTRICTED

TO: THE EXECUTIVE
11 APRIL 2017

EQUALITY SCHEME 2017-20 Director of Corporate Services

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To approve the Council's Equality Scheme 2017-20.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Council's Equality Scheme 2017-20 attached at Annex 1 be approved for publication.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Schedule 1 and 2 of The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 requires that the Council must:
- Prepare and publish equality objectives by 6 April 2012, and at least every four years thereafter.
 - Ensure that those objectives are specific and measurable.
 - Publish those objectives in such a manner that they are accessible to the public.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None. The approach the Council is taking to develop its equality scheme is in line with the Equality and Human Right Commission's (EHRC) guidance on developing equality objectives.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 Bracknell Forest Council is required in the Equality Act 2010 public sector equality duty regulations to publish equality objectives by 6th April 2012 and then at least every four years thereafter. The scheme which will be published in April 2017 highlights our equality objectives, including those to promote good community relations. Through service planning, the Council will ensure that the objectives are achievable, measurable and outcome focused with actions identified in the Council's service plans; particularly given the current financial climate and there being no additional resources to implement the Equality Scheme.

Developing the Scheme

- 5.2 This scheme has been produced following guidance from EHRC on developing equality objectives. The equality objectives have been identified following a review of evidence and existing strategies which highlight the key equality issues facing the borough, as well as consideration of the strategic themes and the key measures of success that the Council has set in the Council Plan 2015-19.
- 5.3 The research and strategies considered in forming the equality objectives, such as the Council's Older People's Strategy, Children and Young People's Plan and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) were developed with extensive and recent consultation with our diverse community. The JSNA is now the Council's key document for assessing inequalities in the borough.
- 5.4 The Council consulted on the draft equality scheme from 2 February 2017 for 6 weeks by means of two online surveys. One internal consultation for elected members and Council staff and a separate consultation for partners, thematic partnerships and voluntary/community groups which was also made available on the Council's consultation portal. An easy read questionnaire was also sent out via the Learning Disability Partnership Board. The draft scheme outlined the equality objectives and asked for feedback on these. The consultation plan is included as Appendix 1.

Equality Scheme 2017-20 Consultation Results

- 5.5 There were 68 responses to the elected member/staff survey and 26 responses to the public survey. Respondents were asked to rate how important they considered each objective to be for them and their local community.

Objective 1 - Access to our information, services and facilities is fair and equitable for everyone.

The majority of residents (81%), including those representing community groups and staff/members (94%) consider this objective important and it was seen as the most important objective. Key issues and concerns are around early intervention and access for the most vulnerable and deprived in the community and accessibility of information for the vulnerable, people with disabilities and those from BME communities.

Objective 2 - High levels of community cohesion are maintained.

77% of residents and 74% of staff respondents consider this important. Key concerns are isolation of older community and working more with BME groups and voluntary sector.

Objective 3 - Gaps in outcomes for citizens are narrowed.

62% of residents and 69% of staff respondents considered this important and this was lower than the other objectives. It is possible that this is because the terminology is confusing and more difficult to understand. Key concerns are around equal access to services and early intervention.

Objective 4 - A positive, diverse and inclusive workforce is ensured and promoted.

73% of residents and 75% of staff considered this important. Key issues raised by the public include flexible working and staff training. Staff issues focussed on equal access to training and resources across the council, increased stress levels, mental health amongst staff and gender and disability equality.

- 5.6 The results of this consultation were used to finalise the Equality Scheme 2017-20 attached at Annex 1 and its equality objectives. All those equality objectives listed in the scheme link to the Council Plan and can be delivered upon without the allocation of any new resources; they will be met within existing agreed budgets.
- 5.7 Many of the objectives within the Council's previous equality schemes and the Bracknell Forest Partnership Community Engagement Strategy have now become a part of mainstream business. For example delivering equality and diversity training to staff and members is integrated into the Member Development Strategy and Workforce Development Plan, and so this is highlighted in section five of the Equality Scheme.
- 5.7 The Council has developed the equality objectives further by identifying actions and selecting the performance indicators it will use to demonstrate its progress annually on achieving the objectives. This has been linked to the service planning process for 2017-18 to ensure that the implementation of the equality objectives will be integrated, wherever possible, into the mainstream delivery and monitoring of services across the Council.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The Scheme meets the requirements of The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 for the Council to publish information to demonstrate its compliance with the duty imposed by section 149(1) of the Act i.e. to have due regard to the need to
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 There are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 The Equality Scheme will outline how the Council will meet its legal duties to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 None.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 See the consultation plan attached at Appendix 1 of Annex 1.

Method of Consultation

7.2 See consultation plan attached at Appendix 1 of Annex 1.

Representations Received

7.3 Incorporated into Annex 1.

Background Papers

Annex 1 - Bracknell Forest Council Equality Scheme 2017-20

Contact for further information

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