

To: **The Executive**
16 November 2021

Equality Scheme 2022-25
Assistant Director: Chief Executive's Office

1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To approve the Council's Equality Scheme 2022-25.

2 Recommendation

2.1 That the Council's Equality Scheme 2022-25 attached at Annex 1 be approved for publication.

3 Reasons for Recommendation

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.

The council's 2017-20 'All of Us' Equality Scheme was extended for a year to cover 2020-21 to allow time for development of the new Council Plan in 2019 and directorate service plans. The Covid-19 pandemic further delayed the development of new objectives and an equality scheme in 2021-22. The council's equality objectives are being reviewed and updated for April 2022 as part of developing the new 'All of Us' Equality Scheme 2022-2025.

4 Alternative Options Considered

4.1 None. The council is legally required to publish equality objective. Not having equality objectives and an equality scheme would undermine the progress made by the council over the last 18 months in further developing an inclusive culture that values diversity and the actions in response to the staff Pulse Survey discrimination research. In addition, it would be contrary to the council's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

5 Supporting Information

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 2022 highlights our equality objectives. Actions to deliver on the objectives will be embedded in the service plans for 2022-23 and every year thereafter so that equality, diversity and inclusion are mainstreamed in what we do, as well as how we work. Each equality objective will be underpinned by annual priority actions as required that

take the council towards the achievement of the 3-year strategy. The progress and achievements made will be monitored by the Equalities Group

6 Developing the Scheme

6.1 This scheme has been produced following guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission 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 2019-23. They were also informed by workshops earlier in the year with council staff, elected members and representatives from our partner organisations and local voluntary and community groups.

6.2 The research and strategies considered in forming the equality objectives included:

- Council Plan
- Workforce and Organisational Development Strategy
- Climate change strategy
- Local Plan
- Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

6.3 The council consulted on the draft equality objectives from 1st September for 4 weeks using an online survey. The draft scheme outlined the equality objectives and asked for feedback on these.

Equality Scheme 2022-25 Consultation Results

6.4 There were 52 responses to the online survey (including 6 responses representing community groups). Respondents were asked to rate how important they considered each objective to be for them and their local community. They were also asked to comment on any other issues the council should address in relation to equality or if they had any other comments

Objective 1 - Inclusive in all we do

The majority of respondents (82%) considered this objective as important. Key issues and concerns were around ensuring schools are inclusive, using accessible formats to enable everyone to access information and council staff having adequate training about how disabilities affect residents' daily lives.

Objective 2 – Accessible for all

This objective was considered important by 86% of respondents. Key issues in this area included protecting single sex services for women and girls, recognition of all types of disabilities (visible and invisible), need for more toilet facilities especially in leisure spaces.

A key area of concern was about access to information and ensuring it is available in a range of different formats – not just online or digital formats. Data from the recent Covid-19 residents' survey (April 2021) showed that 94% of Bracknell Forest residents used the internet and were confident in using various forms of digital technology. Residents in more vulnerable groups - those in social housing, disabled

residents and those with caring responsibilities - are less likely to have access to digital devices and less confident about using them. The same applied to residents from Black, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds and older residents.

Objective 3 – Accountable and fair

The majority of respondents (86%) also felt that this objective was important. There were concerns around accessible information, fair access to services and the need for council staff to be fully accountable. There was also an understanding that some residents will need additional support to ensure equal life chances.

Objective 4 – Diverse and inclusive workforce

Again the majority of respondents (86%) considered this objective to be important. There were concerns about the importance of having a well-qualified workforce in the most appropriate roles and that this was more important than so-called 'box ticking' but agreement that management and leadership needs to be inclusive and diverse. Other issues were ensuring a diverse workforce that valued individuals and different backgrounds as well as making sure the workforce reflects the diversity of the local community especially within social care and those being supported.

Objective 5 – Recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic

The majority of respondents (73%) agreed this objective is important although this is slightly lower than the other objectives. Comments included reference to associated mental health issues, staff training to ensure there is understanding on the impact on different communities. A need for services and adequate funding to be put in place to support those communities was also mentioned. The council's second Covid-19 residents' survey (April 2021) also takes into account and details the impact on different people and communities and which areas residents want to prioritise in the future.

- 6.5 The consultation results and comments have been analysed to see if and how the objectives refer to the issues raised. In the most cases the issues mentioned above will be covered in the actions to deliver on the objectives which will be embedded in the service plans for 2022-23. However the following objectives were amended (additional wording in *italics*) to take into account comments made and the changes have been reflected in the attached draft Equalities Scheme Strategy:

Objective 2 - Accessible for all

Our services, information and support will be accessible to those who need them
Ensure that we *provide information*, engage and communicate in ways that are easy to understand for all

Objective 3 - Accountable and Fair

We will treat all people *fairly* without favouritism or discrimination *while recognising some people will need additional support*.

Publication and Monitoring

We will monitor and report our progress in delivering our equality scheme. The council's equality group will closely monitor the implementation and delivery of each of our equality objectives with the progress regularly reported to our corporate management team.

A communication plan will be developed to raise awareness of the new strategy to residents as well as council staff and elected members. The scheme will be available in alternative formats and the council will make reasonable adjustments to ensure it can be accessed, read and understood by all residents.

We will publish Annual Equality Reports that show our progress in the previous financial year on achieving our equality objectives and highlighting equality and inclusion work across the council.

Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 7.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 enacts a single general public sector equality duty (PSED) which applies to public authorities exercising public functions. The duty on the Council is to have "due regard" to the PSED in section 149(1).

Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 the council must prepare and publish at least one equality objective once every four years.

The actions in this report and adoption of the proposed objectives will ensure that the above legal requirements are met

Financial Advice

- 7.2 There are no immediate financial implications arising from the contents of the report. The costs of achieving the council equality objectives will met within existing resources.

Other Consultation Responses

- 7.3 Please see information at 6.1 and 6.4 above.

Equalities Impact Assessment

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

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 7.5 The Public Sector Equality Duty places a legal duty on the council to publish equality monitoring information for our services and workforce by the end of January annually. There is a risk of the council failing to achieve some equality objectives.

The approach to analysing service equality information and reporting will be reviewed prior to April 2022 so that DMT's/ADs have greater involvement in and ownership of the service equality reports and to ensure a high-level summary of the reports is scrutinised. Equality actions identified within the Equalities Scheme will be mainstreamed within directorate service plans and be monitored quarterly through InPhase.

The council's Equality Group will closely monitor the implementation and delivery of each of our Equality Objectives with the progress regularly reported to our corporate management team.

Climate Change Implications

6.6 The recommendations in Section 2 above are expected to:

Have no adverse impact on emissions of CO₂. The reasons the council believes that this will have no impact on emissions are that council's objectives seek to reduce inequalities, advance equality of opportunity to existing services leading to improvements to health and wellbeing.

Background Papers

The Equality and Human Rights Commission are the independent regulator for equality, human rights and good relations in Britain established by the Equality Act 2006. They are an independent statutory body with the responsibility to encourage equality and diversity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, and protect and promote the human rights of everyone in Britain.

They enforce equality legislation on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation

The Public Sector Equality Duty (the Equality Duty) was created by the Equality Act 2010 and came into force on 5 April 2011. The equality duty covers the nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

[Equality Act 2010 | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](http://equalityhumanrights.com)

Contact for further information

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