

POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday, 11 March 2021

DRAFT EQUALITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2021-25

Report of the Head of Strategic Planning and Development

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Panel comment on the draft Strategy and Action Plan at Appendix A.

Summary

The draft Strategy is currently subject to consultation and development ahead of Cabinet on 25 March 2021.

Focus for Scrutiny

Policy development.

Statutory Powers

Equality Act 2010

Strategic Implications

1. The Council has a clear and inclusive mission of 'Supporting Communities and Improving Lives' and has clear statutory duties under the Equality Act 2010. The draft Strategy proposes that there is a renewed approach across all relevant Council areas (wider than the Health and Wellbeing theme of the Corporate Plan) to ensure the Council is not only fulfilling meeting those duties but also meaningfully engaging with communities to address inequality of opportunity and promote cohesion.

Strategy summary and development

2. The document includes:
 - (a) Legal duties – a reminder of the legal basis for actions
 - (b) Actions from the previous Strategy 2016-2020. This section lists a large number of activities to address inequalities, that the Council can celebrate. Future actions will be measured so that success and impact are more visible. The assessment of equalities impacts, the

understanding and awareness of staff and the extent to which equalities issues are embedded in the Council are all areas where the Council seeks to improve.

- (c) Objectives (para 12 a long-term objective and paras 13-15 three more specific objectives for this plan period)
 - (d) Strategy – how the Council will use the activities within its control, the awareness of staff and Councillors, the need to listen and understand community needs, and the way we frame and conduct debates. The Strategy deliberately proposes to engage and better understand the needs of communities before prioritising and confirming actions to address those needs.
 - (e) Actions – more specific areas of activity and what the Council will do.
3. A previous report was brought to this Panel on 15th October 2021, setting out the main legal duties and outlining the strategy development process, with the resolution:
- (a) That the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel noted the contents of the report and convened a Task and Finish Group, to be Chaired by Councillor Asman, to assist officers and the portfolio holder with development of the new Equality Strategy, with particular emphasis on:
 - (1) travellers and illegal encampments as part of the strategy;
 - (2) inclusion of a meaningful and transparent section on Equality Impacts Assessment; and
 - (3) incorporation of Digital Inclusion in the strategy.
4. The Task and Finish Group was formed and has met on 3 occasions (November 25, January 26, February 24). (See below for comments from this Group.)
5. The Gypsy, Romany and Traveller community are specifically referenced in the Strategy, although a specific significant action in relation to this community has not been identified at this stage. The Plan contains a clear action to consult and consider the needs of this community to explore this issue further. It is understood that outcomes (e.g. educational and health) are relatively poor. Hampshire County Council employs a liaison officer with whom the Council can work to explore possible future actions.
6. The Plan contains actions in relation to Equality Impact Assessments i.e. training, support to officers who need to carry out such assessments, materials, data and insight to be gathered to support such assessments, and easier ways to consult community groups on impacts, proportionate to the issue or decision.
7. The Strategy flags the importance of digital inclusion (e.g. para 9) and notes the recent mandatory digital accessibility training for all staff in relation to

documents that the Council publishes. The Plan includes an action to ensure Communications and Customer Services protect channels of communication for people who are digitally excluded. The Council is already gathering data and insight into the extent and forms of digital exclusion to support impact assessments and project and service design.

Comments on the draft Strategy from the Policy and Performance Task and Finish Group

8. The draft Strategy and Action Plan represent a preliminary approach and so it is recommended that the document is described as a Strategy and Action Plan for 21/22. After this first year a clearer set of actions can be developed based on the consultations with community groups and Portfolio and service planning during that year. A new Strategy and Plan for 2022-25 can then be approved and this should be reviewed and updated annually.
9. It should be an objective to, where possible, remove barriers to inclusion and accessing services for all protected characteristics, and protect non-digital channels of communication and accessing services.
10. Actions should be more specific, measurable and time-bound. The Action Plan table will be adapted to articulate more clearly and concretely what action will take place and when.
11. The above comments will be accounted for and changes made to the document that goes forward to Cabinet, subject to comments from the Panel and Cabinet Member for Social Policy.

Financial Implications

12. The Strategy has no implications above existing service and project budgets. Any implications arising from engagement with communities will be subject to future approvals.

Risk Assessment

13. The Council risks only partially fulfilling its mission of 'Supporting Communities and Improving Lives' if it does not take an inclusive approach to all of the communities it serves.
14. The Council is at risk of enforcement by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission if it does not fulfil its general and specific equalities duties.
15. The Council risks conducting inaccurate or disproportionate equality impact assessments and focussing on the wrong issues, if it does not seek the views of communities directly as a first step.

Equality and Diversity Implications

16. The Equality Act is relevant to the decision in this report as it relates entirely to the way the Council meets its duties under the Act and carries out other

activity to address inequality and have a positive impact on all communities. The Strategy is currently subject to consultation with all residents and a range of groups representing people with protected characteristics.

Climate Change and Environmental Implications

17. There are no climate or environmental implications of this report or the draft Strategy and Action Plan. Improved engagement with all the Council's residents will assist in promoting behaviour change and action to reduce climate change.

Conclusion

18. The draft Strategy and Action Plan sets out the Council's proposed approach to addressing equalities duties and inequality of opportunity in respect of Council operations.

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Appendices Attached: Appendix A Draft Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

Previous Equalities Strategy 2016-2020