

**POLICY AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL**

**THURSDAY, 10 MARCH 2022**

**CABINET**

**Thursday, 24 March 2022**

**EQUALITIES STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2022-2025**

**Report of the Strategy Development Senior Specialist**

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**Recommendation(s)**

It is recommended that Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel;

- (1) support the recommendation from the Equalities Task and Finish Group to endorse the strategy and recommend approval to Cabinet

It is recommended that Cabinet;

- (1) approve the Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2022 – 2025 at Appendix 1.
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**Summary**

The Council has legal duties and a community leadership role in the exercise of its functions to address discrimination, promote genuine equal opportunities and foster good relations between different communities in Eastleigh Borough. The Strategy and Action Plan proposes a plan to improve consideration of equalities in the workforce, services, and projects of the Council.

**Statutory Powers**

Equality Act 2010

**Strategic Implications**

1. The Council has a general duty under the Equality Act 2010 requiring public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
  - (a) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;

- (b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
  - (c) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
2. Under the Equality Act all public sector bodies also have a specific duty to:
- (a) Publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general Equality Duty annually. This information must include, information relating to people who share a protected characteristic who are:
    - (i) its employees, and
    - (ii) people affected by its policies and practices.
  - (b) Prepare and publish, at least every four years, one or more objectives that it thinks it needs to achieve to further any of the aims of the general Equality Duty.
3. The strategy proposes that there is an agreed 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 those duties but addressing inequality of opportunity and promoting cohesion.
4. The strategy sets out how the Council will achieve its vision of diversity and equality of opportunity, both as an employer and as a provider of services and supports the Council's corporate priority for health and wellbeing in:
- Enabling healthier lifestyles/ wellbeing
  - Tackling health inequality and deprivation

## **Introduction**

5. The Equalities Strategy and Action Plan was agreed by Cabinet in March 2021 and sets out how the Council will not only fulfil its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010, but work towards embedding an inclusive mindset within all its services, processes, and culture in order to create an approach that values every individual regardless of their background and characteristics.
6. Originally meant to be a 4 year strategy, it was agreed as a 1 year interim strategy to allow for more time to discuss equality implications with groups in the community with a protected characteristic, to better understand what some of the barriers are to accessing Council services, how this can be improved and how the Council can better involve people in equality issues.
7. The current strategy was very much about increasing awareness, in terms of equalities, within the Council and improving processes so that there are positive outcomes for all residents.
8. To achieve this, the strategy outlined 6 objectives to:
- 1. Carry out duties under the Equality Act 2010;
  - 2. Build better links with people with protected characteristics and be more responsive;
  - 3. Recognise and value the diversity of the workforce;

4. Embed an inclusive mindset across the Council;
  5. Address digital exclusion; and
  6. Develop Strategy and Action Plan 2022/2025.
3. Since the strategy was agreed in March 2021, the Council have implemented a number of actions to achieve these objectives, such as:
- Improved consideration of Equalities in service and project planning and for key decisions, including further improvement of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)
  - Engaged with key stakeholders and group, representing people with protected characteristics to understand barriers to participation and access to EBC services.
  - Updated the Council's Equality Impact Assessment template and committee reports to better consider equality implications.
  - Continued the Equality Focus Group (EFG) to ensure that equalities are championed across the organisation and actions to embed equality are implemented.
  - Continued to ensure that communications are accessible, including reviewing how the Council uses translators and interpreters.
  - Revised the Council's online training offer to cover unconscious bias, equality impact assessments and public sector duty.
  - Provided more detailed training for staff with particular roles and responsibilities in championing equalities within the Council.
  - Ran equalities training for all Councillors to increase their awareness of equalities and the importance of embedding an inclusive mindset.
  - Included equalities considerations in planning processes and documentation during the annual planning cycle.
  - Integrated accessibility and other equalities matters into service redesign processes and documentation such as Project Initiation Documents (PID).
  - Began to consider ways the Council can support Digital Inclusion across Eastleigh Borough.
  
  - Provided funding, through the Boroughwide grant, for community groups with an emphasis on digital inclusion and improving accessibility for people affected by covid.

## **Engagement and consultation**

9. A consultation was conducted between 15 February and 15 March 2021 and promoted via social media, the Spring edition of Borough News and directly to certain community groups and individuals known to the Council. It was felt that due to engagement only being carried out within the last year it was not proportionate to conduct another round of engagement as the review did not present as a complete change in direction in terms of the Council's key aims for the strategy.
10. This year was to review the current strategy and seek more views from groups representing people with protected characteristics to understand more

specifically what some of the barriers are to accessing Council services, how this can be improved and how the Council can better involve people in equality issues.

11. Throughout 2021, the Council made efforts to engage with groups and organisations representing people with protected characteristics to build better relationships. This was done through emails, face-to-face meetings (where possible due to restrictions) and Teams meetings. In particular, the Council was keen to know:
  - (a) What are the barriers in terms of protected characteristics (PC) and the Council? Services/ facilities/ equalities issues?
  - (b) How can we improve this?
  - (c) What are the challenges?
  - (d) What works well?
  - (e) How does the Council increase its understanding and awareness of PC?
  - (f) How do we involve people in equality issues?
12. The responses received from these groups have been considered and are now reflected where possible within the document. The Equalities Focus Group (EFG) is also further considering how the Council address some of the issues raised during engagement.
13. The strategy was also considered by the Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel Task and Finish Group in discussion with the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing. The Task and Finish Group have met on 3 occasions (20 July 21, 26 October 21, and 3 February 22) and comments from the group have been included below.

## **Strategy summary and development**

14. The document includes:
  - (a) Definitions and more information on what a protected characteristic is.
  - (b) An introduction and overview of the Council's commitment to fulfil its legal duty under the Act and how it will work towards embedding an inclusive mindset within all its services, processes, and culture.
  - (c) Background – the Council's general duty and the need to have due regard to advance equal opportunity.
  - (d) List of successes from the previous strategy.
  - (e) 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 this is framed and conducts debates.
  - (f) Objectives - setting out how we will get there, and what success will look like.
  - (g) Action Plan – list of actions to be implemented and reviewed regularly by the EFG.
  - (h) Appendix – local data (up-to-date data has been used where possible and will be updated once the Census 2021 has been released).

15. Comments from community groups and the panel have indicated that there should be more information on what is meant by a protected characteristic which is why the document now includes definitions at the beginning of the strategy. These definitions should also be included on the Council's website to increase awareness of the Equality Act 2010.
16. Earlier discussions have suggested that the strategy should have actions which are more specific and measurable. This has been done where possible, however it is not always easy to include a measurable KPI for equalities work as it can consist of programmes of work which are anecdotal. The strategy has highlighted 'what success will look like' to demonstrate how the Council are achieving actions throughout its implementation.
17. More prominence is given to actions around ensuring there is guidance and information on the Staff Hub (the Council's internal intranet system) and that this is accessible to people who may be visually impaired.
18. The Council will also update the website to invite groups to be more involved in equalities work if they wish and include information of staff they can contact to take forward these discussions.
19. The feedback included an action on the Council's continued commitment to encouraging inclusive recruitment through support of the Disability Confident Scheme.
20. The feedback included an action to review the strategy once the new Census 2021 data has been published to help inform the Council's approach.
21. General definitions and actions have been firmed up, so they are clearer.
22. Some specific comments were not included in this action plan as they require further discussion about how they will be implemented. For instance, the Council is considering how best to gather information on customer satisfaction. This will highlight additional equalities implications for how residents are accessing Council services.

### **Financial Implications**

23. 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**

24. 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.
25. 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.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

26. 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.
27. Therefore, an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is at appendix 2.

## **Climate Change and Environmental Implications**

28. 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**

29. 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: 1 Equality Strategy and Action Plan 2022/25  
2 Equality Impact Assessment

## **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.

None.