

Committee: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 28 April 2016

Title of Report: Setting of Equality Objectives

Report by: Diane Wood, Chief Executive

Cabinet Member: Councillor Barry Doughty, Cabinet Member for Fire, Public Safety and Central Support Services

What is the Report About? (Executive Summary)

- 1 This report asks Cabinet to agree a refreshed set of Equality Objectives in line with the Council's statutory requirements to have these in place under the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 2 Under the Equality Duty, these objectives must be refreshed every four years. The current objectives were agreed in April 2012 and are therefore due to be refreshed by April 2016.

Recommendation of the Corporate Director

Recommendation 1 Cabinet agree the Equality Objectives set out at paragraph 7.

Recommendation 2 Cabinet invite Scrutiny to review progress in meeting the Equality Objectives to feed into a refresh of the Equality Objectives early in the term of the new Council.

Background to the Proposals

- 3 In February 2016, Council approved the Council Plan for 2016-2019 and the Medium Term Financial Plan. These documents recognised that going forward, the Council will have to focus its resources and work in different ways in order to meet its statutory responsibilities and serve the people of Cumbria.
- 4 Even with a changing Council, it remains essential that the Public Sector Equality Duty is met. The General Duty requires that public authorities pay 'due regard' to:
 - Preventing discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
 - Advancing equality of opportunity.
 - Promoting good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not.

- 5 Over the past few years the Council has mainstreamed its approach to equalities, and made good progress in collecting data that reflects the different strands of diversity. The consideration of equality issues is integrated into all aspects of strategic planning, service planning and the commissioning and procurement of services. This includes consideration of rurality given its importance for the county and the impact it has on the delivery of services. This approach allows the Council to meet its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
- 6 In addition to ensuring that decisions address equality, the Public Sector Equality Duty requires local authorities to publish Equality Objectives. The purpose is to show how the Council will improve the lives of people protected by the Equality Act.
- 7 The Council has successfully implemented a set of objectives that were agreed in April 2012. These are due for a refresh in line with government guidance and have been considered in the light of the Council Plan priorities and findings from recent Equality Needs Analysis. The proposed new Equality Objectives are :
- Providing equality of opportunity through access to services for all and delivering services which meet the needs of our customers.
 - Fostering good relations by understanding the communities we serve and create meaningful engagement.
 - Eliminating discrimination through the review of our operational and work place policies and procedures.
- 8 These three overarching objectives will ensure that the Council meets its Equality Duty and are similar to those adopted by a number of other public sector bodies in Cumbria including the Constabulary, the CCG and the Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. In adopting them, the Council will ensure a consistent approach to equality, and be able to explore opportunities for joint working with its partners.
- 9 In support of each of the three overarching objectives, the Council will undertake a range of activity aimed at further developing the Council's approach to equalities. These actions are integrated in the Council Plan Delivery Plan, Digital Strategy and the Workforce Plan, and in Service Plans.

Provide equality of opportunity through access to services for all and delivering services which meet the needs of our customers

Action will include:

- Piloting the use of technology with identified groups of customers to ensure the introduction of a new digital platform to facilitate ease of access for our customers is successful.
- Adopting an increasingly individualised approach to the assessment of people's needs to ensure their diverse needs are met effectively.
- Reshaping of learning disability and mental health services to ensure the focus is on recovery and independence.

Fostering good relations by understanding the communities we serve and deliver meaningful engagement

Action will include:

- Engagement with groups of people that represent diverse communities to inform a review of the Equality Objectives in 2017.
- Through the Member Development Programme raise awareness of Equality and Diversity issues and inform the induction programme for new Members following the elections in 2017.
- Working with communities and the third sector to enable them to shape, own, or run local services to meet their local needs and promote healthy communities.
- Developing the area based working methodology to allow local communities to input into the design of services in their area.
- Working with partners to share good practice and where appropriate deliver a joined up service to our communities.
- Recognising Armed Forces personnel as a part of the community we serve and meeting the obligations under the Armed Forces Covenant.

Eliminate discrimination through the systematic review of our operational and work place policies and procedures

Action will include :

- A positive campaign to encourage the reporting of discrimination and other serious issues, including Hate Crime, Domestic Violence and Child Sexual Exploitation.
 - Creating a working environment that values and respects identity, ability and the culture of each individual and that challenges discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation.
 - Embedding the new competency framework which outlines the key skills, knowledge and behaviours needed for the Council of the future.
 - Developing and training the workforce to ensure everyone is aware of their responsibilities under equality legislation.
 - Supporting informed decision making using an Equality Assessment process that identifies issues for consideration so that informed decisions are taken. This includes the consideration of rurality and rural proofing where appropriate.
- 10 The Equality Objectives outlined above will support the Council's commitment to serving the people of Cumbria by embracing change and transforming the way it operates, to ensure that high quality services are delivered to the people who need them the most. The focus over the next four years will therefore be on raising the profile of these objectives and ensuring that the Council takes all reasonable steps to address them. This would meet the positive requirements of the Equality Duty – to advance equality of opportunity.
- 11 Progress against each of these objectives will be considered as part of the annual Equality Needs Analysis and published on the Council's website. This will meet the transparency requirements of the Equality Duty.

- 12 Furthermore it is proposed that Scrutiny is invited to review progress against the Equality Objectives and in doing so engage with groups within Cumbria to inform a refresh of the Objectives following the Cumbria County Council elections in May 2017.

Options Considered and Risks Identified

Option (a)

- Cabinet can agree the Equality Objectives as outlined above.

Option (b)

- Cabinet can amend or suggest alternative Equality Objectives for the Council.

Risks – The renewal of the Equality Objectives is a statutory obligation and if they are not refreshed then the Council will be in breach of its obligations.

Reasons for the recommendation/Key benefits

- To enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations.
- To allow the Council to demonstrate that it takes equality seriously.
- To act as a reference point for future Equality Needs Analysis.

Financial – What Resources will be needed and how will it be Funded?

- 13 It is considered that the recommendations within this report will be implemented within existing Council budgets. There are no specific value for money issues related to this report.

Legal Aspects – What needs to be Considered?

- 14 The renewal of the Equality Objectives is a statutory obligation and must be implemented. There are no further legal considerations, all legal issues and implications have been addressed within the detail of the report.

Council Plan Priority – How do the Proposals Contribute to the Delivery of the Council's Stated Objectives?

- 15 The adoption of Equality Objectives is a statutory requirement. The adoption of the objectives and associated actions will allow the Council to demonstrate it is considering Equality when delivering against the Council Plan:

What is the Impact of the Decision on Health Inequalities and Equality and Diversity Issues?

- 16 The adoption of Equality Objectives allows the Council to demonstrate its commitment to Equality and provides a context for Equality Needs Analysis.

Further Information and Background Documents

- 17 None.

Key Facts

Electoral Division(s): All

Executive Decision	Key Decision Included in Forward Plan	Exempt from call-in	Exemption agreed by scrutiny chair	Considered by scrutiny, if so detail below	Environmental or sustainability assessment undertaken?	Equality impact assessment undertaken?
✓						✓

Previous relevant Council or Executive decisions

The previous set of Equality Objectives were agreed by Cabinet in April 2012.

Consideration by Overview & Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny are invited to review the Equality Objectives during 2016/2017.

Background Papers

No background papers.

Report Author

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