

Agenda Item No: **Report No:**

Report Title: **Annual Equalities Report 2013/14**

Report To: **Cabinet** **Date:** **29 September 2014**

Cabinet Member: **Councillor Elayne Merry**

Ward(s) Affected: **All**

Report By: **Nazeya Hussain, Director of Business Strategy and Development**

Contact Officer(s)-

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Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the 2012-2014 Equality Action Plan, to seek approval of the current year's planned activities and endorsement of the proposed new community leaflet.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 Progress against our equality objectives to be noted .
 - 2 The actions for 2014/15 be agreed (see Appendix 1).
 - 3 The content of the community update leaflet 'One District, One Council: Valuing Diversity, Promoting Equality' to be agreed for publication and distribution to key locations and partners (see Appendix 2).
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Reasons for Recommendations

1.1 The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the basis of the protected characteristics of disability, race, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership. The Act applies to employment rights, service provision, and the provision of goods and facilities.

1.2 The Act includes a public sector equality duty (PSED), which requires public authorities to proactively consider equality implications in all they do. It is made up of a general duty and specific duties. The general duty requires us to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. The specific duty requires us to

- Every four years, prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objective that helps us further the aims of the general duty.
- Annually, publish information to demonstrate compliance with the general duty that relates to both employees and service users who share protected characteristics.

1.3 The Equality and Human Rights Commission undertake regulatory work on the public sector equality duty to ensure compliance with the legal requirements.

1.4 The recommendation to agree and publish 'One District, One Council: Valuing Diversity, Promoting Equality' help us to meet the PSED.

Background

2.1 During 2011-12 we undertook a detailed self-assessment against the Equality Framework for Local Government. The framework is an assessment and improvement tool developed by the Local Government Association that is used to help us check we are meeting our statutory duties and operating according to good practice. To gain an independent and external view on how we were doing, we also commissioned The Equality Academy to undertake a Diversity Health Check. These assessments helped us to identify where we were doing well and where improvements could be made and so helped us shape our equality objectives for the period 2012-16. The assessments also identified actions that could be taken to improve our performance on equalities, and these have informed our Equality Action Plan for the two year period 2012-14.

2.2 We have made good progress and completed 87% of the actions identified in the plan. The remaining actions will be considered as part of the current year's programme of activities. A one year Equalities Action Plan has been developed for 2014-15, to ensure progress continues and opportunities to promote equality are considered throughout the current service restructure. The plan includes developing a more strategic approach to our work on equality, diversity and inclusion and reviewing of some of the keys tools we use to improve services, such as equality analysis and use of equalities monitoring data.

2.3 Responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion work has recently been transferred to the Business Strategy and Performance Team within the Business Strategy and Development Directorate.

Equality Objectives

2.4 Key activities undertaken during 2013-15 towards achieving our equality objectives included:

- Awareness and understanding – ensure all councillors and staff receive appropriate learning opportunities so that good practice in equality and diversity is embedded in the culture and work practises of the organisation.
 - Introduced refresher training for longstanding staff and provided training for councillors.

- Supported 14 staff members in completing the NCFE Level 2 Certificate in Equality and Diversity.
- Devised a Cultural Calendar for staff to highlight important faith dates.
- Developed guidance on Human Rights.
- Flexibility and responsiveness – ensure effective use of engagement, consultation, monitoring and equality analysis to develop services that are responsive to the diverse needs of our community.
 - Considered equality issues when making important decisions to help us consider the needs of everyone.
 - Reviewed 15 of our services and identified improvements we can make to promote equality in all of them.
 - Reached out to all schools and colleges in the district, with staff volunteering to deliver talks and work on projects with young people.
- Fairness and accessibility – ensure offices and services are accessible to people with disabilities.
 - Introduced ‘BrowseAloud’ to make our website more accessible. Visitors can listen to the site and change colour contrasts and text sizes.
 - Given our contractors a postcard highlighting equalities issues to think about when visiting people in their homes.
 - Supported the Sompriti project – a bi-lingual advocacy and outreach service for black and minority residents. The service helped over 30 people access our services.
 - Provided more flexible, accessible and comfortable working conditions for staff

2.5 To comply with the PSED, our equality objectives for 2016-2020 will be reviewed, consulted on and refreshed during the 2015-2016 year.

The Equality Framework for Local Government

2.6 The Equality Framework for Local Government is based on the three performance areas of ‘developing’, ‘achieving’, and ‘excellent’ and measures against criteria in five performance areas.

2.7 The detailed self-assessment completed in 2011 identified that we fulfilled the majority of the criteria for a ‘developing’ council. The self-assessment identified the actions required enable us to reach the ‘achieving’ level.

2.8 A reassessment of our performance against the ‘achieving’ level of the Equality Framework for Local Government is planned in 2014-15, and consideration will then be able to be given to applying for accreditation if appropriate.

Equality Analysis

2.9 We undertake Equality Analysis (EA) as part of our decision making and service review processes. Undertaking equality analysis helps us to identify any impacts and possible improvements to services.

2.10 During 2013-14, equality analysis was undertaken on 48 occasions as part of key decision making and project work. Additionally, a total of 15 service areas were also analysed for their performance on equalities under our rolling programme of scheduled reviews.

2.11 In approximately half of the analysis undertaken, no further action was required. Recommendations for further action were identified in just over half of the equality analysis undertaken. These actions covered a range of project and service improvements, with some examples being:

- A more proactive approach to canvassing customers for feedback within Tourist Information Centres.
- The development of improved complaint recording to capture and use equalities data to improve services.
- Ensuring contrasting colour schemes and clear signage are used when public conveniences are refurbished, as well as the development of a Community Toilets Scheme and Changing Places facilities for disabled adults.
- Simplified charging tariffs for car parking, introducing the ability to pay by phone, and improved signage for extension of time limits for blue badge holders.
- Budgeting workshops and assistance in making on-line benefits claims for tenants in rent arrears.
- Review of the information sent to people applying for Disabled Facilities and Renovations Grants to ensure it is easy to understand and written in plain English.
- Reviewed criteria and application methods for assisted collections for waste and recycling services.
- Introduced accessibility features, such as dual-colours, highlighting, translation for community languages and audio content, and PDF reading to our website.
- Engage in community consultation to determine the views and needs of residents when considering any plans to redevelop sites such as St Mary's or Walmer Road Skate Park.
- Environmental areas inspected for feasibility of installing wider entrance gates and access paths, onsite or nearby car parking facilities, and handrails on stepped or steep areas to make them more accessible.
- Accessibility features to be built into the building design of the new shared facility in Newhaven.

2.12 A full report of the equality analysis undertaken and the recommendations identified has been provided to the Equalities Working Group who are working to ensure all recommendations from these reports are implemented within services. Equality Analysis Reports undertaken during the current year can also be found on Infolink and on our website.

2.13 During 2014-15, we plan to review the current approach to equality analysis to make it simpler and encourage more meaningful analysis, review the current rolling programme to ensure it is relevant to the new service structure, and follow this up with training to managers on the new approach. Appendix A provides a summary of our planned work for 2014/15.

Summary

2.14 We have made strong progress towards achieving our equality objectives, with 87% of actions in the Equality Action Plan being completed by April 2014.

2.15 Publishing an Annual Report 'One District, One Council: Valuing Diversity, Promoting Equality' (see Appendix B) will help us to show our progress to staff and service users and bring to life some of the positive outcomes from our activities. This also helps us demonstrate our compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty. Cabinet is therefore asked to agree the publication and distribution of this report.

2.16 The 2014-15 Action Plan (summarised at Appendix A) has been developed to ensure continuous progress continues and opportunities to promote equality are considered throughout the current service restructure. The plan includes developing a more strategic approach to equality and diversity work and reviewing of some of the key tools we use to improve services, such as equality analysis and equalities monitoring. Again, Cabinet is asked to agree the proposed approach.

Financial Appraisal

There are no direct budget costs attached to this report. The financial implications of implementing individual equality actions to achieve objectives may be the subject of further reports.

Legal Implications

The Legal Services Department has made the following comments:
The recommendations to note progress against the 2012-14 Equalities Action Plan, and to note and agree the 2014-15 Equality Action Plan, help us to meet the public sector equality duty.

Environmental Implications

The Environmental Implications questionnaire was undertaken by Lisa Tiller on 31 July 2014. It identified a positive impact on human wellbeing with an overall significance rating of 720.

Risk Management Implications

The Risk Management Checklist was completed by Lisa Tiller on 31 July 2014 and no risks have been identified.

Equality Implications

Equalities analysis screening was undertaken by Lisa Tiller on 31 July 2014. It was found that full analysis was not required as the impacts identified were positive across all protected agreements.

Background Papers

Equality Framework for Local Government Self-Assessment Report – August 2011

Making it Real – Diversity Health Check Report – February 2012

2013-14 Equality Analysis Annual Report

Lewes in Figures 2013

Employment Report 2013

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equalities Action Plan 2014-15: Summary

Appendix 2 - One District, One Council: Valuing Diversity, Promoting Equality