

Agenda Item No: 8
Report To: Cabinet
Date: 12/05/2016
Report Title: Equalities Objectives
Report Author: Nicholas Clayton, Policy and Performance Officer
Portfolio Holder: Gerry Clarkson, Leader of the Council



Summary: The Equality Act 2010 applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions.

Under the Act, the Council must also agree at least one *Equalities Objective*, to be reviewed at least every four years.

The Council's previous objectives were agreed by Management Team in March 2012, and have been reviewed and reshaped in light of the new Corporate Plan.

Key Decision: NO

Affected Wards: ALL

Recommendations: **The Cabinet be asked to:-**

1. Approve the revised Equalities Objectives

Policy Overview: The Equality Act 2010 applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions. In general terms, the Act places a legal duty on Ashford Borough Council's staff and councillors in carrying out its functions to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- foster good relations between different groups

Financial Implications: N/A

Risk Assessment N/A

Impact Assessment N/A – Individual Impact Assessments will be carried out for measures relating to each objective area (as appropriate)

Contacts: Nicholas.clayton@ashford.gov.uk – Tel: (01233 330208)

Report Title: Equalities Objectives

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider a revised set of Equalities Objectives, which lay out how the Council will further the general aims of the Equality Act 2010.
2. The Equality Act 2010 applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions.
3. Under the Act, the Council must agree at least one Equalities Objective, to be reviewed at least every four years.

Background

4. The Equality Act 2010 applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions.
5. In general terms, the Act places a legal duty on Ashford Borough Council's staff and councillors when carrying out its functions to:
 - a. eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - b. advance equality of opportunity between different groups
 - c. foster good relations between different groups
6. This *General Duty* covers people with the following protected characteristics – age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, sex (previously referred to as gender), gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity. Eliminating discrimination also covers marriage and civil partnership. The duty also sets the standard for partners and providers delivering services on the Council's behalf.
7. As a public body, Ashford Borough Council also has specific *Public Sector Equality Duties*, set out in Schedules 1 and 2 of the Act, which place additional requirements on the organisation. This includes the annual publication of equalities statistics on the Council's own workforce and the ongoing assessment of how it is achieving the General Duty. The Council must also agree at least one *Equalities Objective*, to be reviewed at least every four years.

Our Approach to Equalities

8. Over and above the legislative requirements, Ashford Borough Council takes a wider view on equalities – an approach which in turn has informed the three themes set out in the organisation's equality objectives.

9. The Council's approach embraces the need to embed equality of opportunity and fairness of treatment - not only within the organisation's recruitment and development of its own staff - but also when developing and delivering its services. Moreover, there is a crucial role that the Council plays as a community leader across the borough, able to influence others in the public, private and voluntary sectors in order to incorporate equality within the wider fabric of the borough.
10. The Council's new corporate plan, adopted in December 2015, sets a range of 'Underpinning Principles' which support the council's four priority areas. These principles reaffirm an aspiration that Ashford Borough Council remains a well-resourced, effective, high quality and high standards organisation. Fairness and equality are enshrined within this principle, as part of a commitment to delivering effective, quality services.

Previous Equalities Objectives

11. The Council's previous objectives (**Appendix B**) were agreed by the Management Team in March 2012, and made publically available on the website.
12. The two overarching objectives provided a clear commitment from the Council to actively pursue the equality of opportunity and fairness outlined within the Equality Act. During a period of financial and service reform across local government this commitment was crucial in ensuring that the necessary changes made did not unnecessarily impact upon those with protected characteristics (*Objective 1*). This was matched by an assurance to make decisions based on the most appropriate, up-to-date insight, alongside the Council's stated strategic desire to move towards responsive, customer-focused and efficient service delivery (*Objective 2*).
13. Whilst it is important to note that the Council continues to meet fully the two objectives set in 2012, they have been reviewed and reshaped in the light of the new Corporate Plan.
14. Alongside these objectives, and in accordance with the legislative requirements, every year the Council also publishes equalities information on its own workforce and on the Ashford borough itself. These help to ensure that the Council's policies and decision-making take account of equalities issues. Appropriate impact assessment of changes to policy and procedure are considered throughout policy development and are reported to Members as part of Cabinet reports.

New Equalities Objectives

15. As noted above, the Council's updated objectives have not only been refreshed in light of the new direction set by the recently-agreed corporate plan, but are also now consistent with the style and form adopted by a number of other Kent authorities. Rather than merely listing objectives, the three new

overarching objectives relate to discrete areas of the Council's operations, namely -

- 1) As a community leader
 - 2) As a service provider, and
 - 3) As an employer
16. For each of these areas, a number of measures are set out by which the Council can secure its overriding objective. The vast majority of these cover a continuation of pre-existing good practice across the authority.
17. Ashford Borough Council's revised Equalities Objectives are included in **Appendix A**.

Evaluating our Objectives

18. The Council's approach to equalities does not stand still, and evolves in response to the changing requirements of this agenda, and to meet the needs of any changes to the organisation's service delivery.
19. Separate from the legislative requirement to review the Council's Equality Objectives at least every four years, the Council regularly monitors both the information it holds which provide an understanding of local equalities issues and trends, alongside appropriate ongoing assessment of the impact of any material changes in its policies or procedures.
20. The updated Equalities Objectives found in Appendix A are complemented by a range of actions which the Council will pursue. In order to evaluate the success of these measures, where possible the actions listed under each objective include an indication of the ways the Council can demonstrate achievement.

Impact Assessment

21. N/A – Individual Impact Assessments will be carried out for measures relating to each objective area (as appropriate).

Conclusion

22. Endorsement and publication of Equalities Objectives helps the Council to demonstrate compliance with Schedule 1 and 2 of the Equality Act 2010. Moreover, setting these objectives helps the Council to better perform the general equality duty, focusing on the outcomes to be achieved.

Portfolio Holder's Views

23. Ashford Borough Council takes pride in being a non-discriminatory organisation, not only when considering our own workforce but also in the widest sense for the betterment of borough.
24. These objectives crystallise this commitment to fairness and equality, and set out strong steps that the Council will take over the next four years to advance this important agenda.

Contact: Nicholas Clayton, Policy and Performance Officer
(01233 330208)

Email: Nicholas.Clayton@ashford.gov.uk

Appendix A

Ashford Borough Council

Equalities Objectives

Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions. In general terms, the Act places a legal duty on Ashford Borough Council's staff and councillors in carrying out its functions to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- b) advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- c) foster good relations between different groups

The duty covers people with the following protected characteristics – age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, sex (previously referred to as gender), gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity. Eliminating discrimination also covers marriage and civil partnership. The duty also sets the standard for partners and providers delivering services on the Council's behalf.

In delivering the Council's new [Five Year Corporate Plan: for Aspiration, Action and Achievement, 2015-2020](#), the authority will ensure that it gives both due regard to the Equality Act 2010 and an ongoing commitment to its Equalities Objectives:

Ashford Borough Council's Equalities Objectives, 2016-2020

1. As a community Leader

The Council is responsible for engaging with residents in an open and meaningful way, whilst basing its decisions on an understanding of local communities. This in turn creates cohesive communities that foster good relations between people from different backgrounds.

The Council will -

- Make democratic, informed and transparent decisions (*demonstrated through the Council's Constitution, by holding open public committee meetings, and publishing agendas and minutes*)
- Work with Ashford's communities to tackle disadvantage and discrimination through consultation and involvement, while utilising councillors' personal knowledge and understanding of their communities (*demonstrated by adherence to the Councillor Code of Conduct, Statement of Community Involvement, online surveys and polls through the Ashford Voice magazine*)

2. As a service provider

The Council understands that some people find it difficult to access services or take part in public life. The authority will promote fairness and inclusion, removing barriers to services and opportunities to make sure that they are inclusive and accessible.

The Council will –

- Conduct an appropriate Impact Assessment when making changes to policies and services (*demonstrated by the inclusion of such assessments in Cabinet reports*)
- Monitor and review the equality information it collects to develop a better understanding of residents and customers – updating and publishing this information annually to make sure services are delivered appropriately and sensitively in order to ensure equality of treatment
- Monitor service delivery and overall performance against its new Corporate Plan (*demonstrated by quarterly performance reporting and scrutiny by councillors*)
- Be open and responsive to complaints and comments (*demonstrated by adherence to the Council's Complaints Policy, and annual reporting on complaints to the Council's Management Team*)
- Act entrepreneurially to develop innovative and cost-effective services which are convenient and well-communicated to residents (*demonstrated through the corporate and service planning processes*)
- Provide a range of learning and development to staff and councillors – including on equalities issues (*demonstrated by completion of appropriate e-learning module on 'Equality, Diversity and Discrimination' by all staff*)

3. As an employer

The Council understands that a diverse workforce results in better informed decision-making, and that a stable, motivated workforce achieves high productivity and effective results.

The Council will –

- Recruit, appraise and train staff according to a comprehensive Competency Framework.
- Provide equality of opportunity in all aspects of recruitment, work conditions and working environment, including –
 - Recruitment
 - Promotion
 - Training opportunities (*demonstrated by consideration in appraisal process*)
 - Pay and reward (*demonstrated by publishing an annual Pay Policy Statement*)
 - Grievances(*all demonstrated by adherence to appropriate personnel policies*)
- Conduct an annual survey of all staff

- Regularly monitor the characteristics of its own workforce, updating and publishing this information annually
- Operating a consultative committee with staff representatives
- Monitor and review employment practices annually

The Council will publish these objectives on its website, monitor them regularly and review them every four years (no later than May 2020)

Appendix B

Previous Equalities Objectives (agreed March 2012)

The Equality Act 2010 applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies carrying out public functions. In summary, the Act places a legal duty on Ashford Borough Council's staff and councillors in carrying out its functions to:

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimization
- b) advance equality of opportunity between different groups
- c) foster good relations between different groups

The duty covers people with the following protected characteristics – age, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, sex (previously referred to as gender), gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity. The eliminating discrimination aim also covers marriage and civil partnership.

The duty also sets the standard for partners and providers delivering services on the Council's behalf. The Equality Act is supported by the Council's Disciplinary Policy and Code of Conduct for elected councillors.

In delivering our 5 year business plan we will ensure that we give due regard to the Equality Act 2010 with a commitment to the following:

EQUALITIES OBJECTIVES

1. We will eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations whilst delivering decent, cost effective services.
= We will know we are achieving this objective by ensuring that
 - i) our services, policies and procedures meet this objective, including those relating to our staff recruitment and retention.
 - ii) decisions we make about service delivery and budgets do not impact unfairly or disproportionately on service users or residents with protected characteristics.
 - iii) the authority provides a range of learning and development opportunities to staff and councillors, including on equalities issues.

2. We will ensure that we have a clear knowledge and understanding of our customers needs, and that we provide an appropriate and convenient choice of ways to access our services.
= We will know we are achieving this objective by ensuring that
 - i) we hold a sufficiently robust, open and up-to-date evidence base regarding the needs and demographic profile of our residents; applying this transparently when making decisions whilst utilising councillors' personal knowledge and understanding of local communities
 - ii) we develop new ways for local people to access our services which are cost-effective, convenient and well promoted.

We will publish these objectives on our website and review them every four years.