

# Policy and Resources Committee

28 June 2017

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?

Yes

## Equalities Policy 2017- 21 and Objectives

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	Policy and Resources Committee
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy, Communication and Governance
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Anna Collier, Policy and Information Manager Orla Sweeney, Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	All

### This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. Agree that the Equalities Policy and new objectives be adopted.

### This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all; and
- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

The Equalities Policy and Objectives are key documents that underpin our Corporate Priorities and support the Council's ongoing commitment to the residents of Maidstone, ensuring that the Council is accountable, transparent and involving residents in its decision making.

### Timetable

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Policy and Resources Committee	28 June 2017

# Equalities Policy 2017-21 and Objectives

## 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Equalities Act 2010 introduced responsibilities and a duty for public authorities to fulfil which includes: publishing information to demonstrate compliance with the duty annually; and to set and publish equality objectives every four years.
  - 1.2 It replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act; simplifying the law, removing inconsistencies, making it easier to understand and comply with. It also strengthened the law to help tackle inequality and discrimination.
  - 1.3 Prior to, and since the introduction of the Act, Maidstone Borough Council has been proactive in reviewing the way in which equalities are considered as part of its Public Sector Equalities Duty and within the culture of the organisation.
  - 1.4 The Equalities Policy explains the Council's responsibilities, setting out the objectives and action it will take. In order to ensure that the Council continues to support and strengthen its decision making with an evidence based assessment of equalities implications, the process has been aligned with the Strategic Planning process.
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## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As an organisation we are working towards the same strategic aims and objectives.
- 2.2 The Equalities Policy has been refreshed (Appendix B). However, as the refresh was not dictated by legislative changes and therefore not time sensitive, it was an opportune time to align the equalities process to the strategic planning process.
- 2.3 The Strategic Plan 2015-2020, 2017/2018 update, is overarching to the Equalities Policy and its objectives.
- 2.4 An assessment of the Strategic Plan's commitments for the next year, particularly in the three main action areas (detailed below) has been made to ensure the Policy and Information team can be proactive in continuing to ensure evidence based Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs) are being undertaken. This forms one of the new objectives proposed at Appendix A:
  - Providing a Clean and Safe Environment
  - A Home for Everyone
  - Regenerating the Town Centre

- 2.8 EqIAs are published on the Council's website. Publishing relevant equality information demonstrates transparent, decision making processes. The Council also becomes accountability to its service users by providing residents with the information they need to hold it to account, should they need to, for its performance on equality.
- 2.9 Completing robust EqIAs are a key part of risk management in the Council's decision making process. Sufficient consideration of equalities helps ensure the delivery equitable services for Maidstone. This ensures adherence to equalities legislation and in turn safeguards against legal challenge.
- 2.10 An extensive review has been undertaken to evaluate equalities performance to date.
- 2.11 The review revisited all previous activity in relation to equalities; from the Overview and Scrutiny Review undertaken in 2008 to an Internal Audit and Peer Review undertaken more recently. All recommendations made were examined to assess whether or not they had been completed and if so continued to be adhered to; to determine any other relevant actions that could be taken. The review included the most recent set of equalities objectives and actions.
- 2.12 The review considered community cohesion. It was identified that the Council's continued support and involvement with Involve and the five forums they manage provides the most cohesive method of engagement with Maidstone's wider society especially those who are hardest to reach.
- 2.13 Radicalisation and extremist ideologies are a pertinent consideration in today's society. The Council is part of multiagency referral process and is compliant with its duty with regards to the Prevent agenda. An equalities objective that targets a specific community would be discriminative and therefore has not been considered.
- 2.14 The following successes should be noted across the three roles the Council has within equalities from this body of work:

#### As a Community Leader

- The bi annual Residents Survey is now delivered in house. Target analysis is now undertaken using Acorn Customer Insight. For example, ward level analysis is provided to each ward Councillor and service specific analysis to Heads of Service. This provides an additional evidence base to support informed decision making, reflecting the needs of residents.
- Business Transformation Programme. The programme focused on making council correspondence more customer friendly, looking at areas

where there were a high number of customer contacts and additional correspondence being sent as a result of overly complicated language being used. Council tax bills and reminders, for example, were improved with the use of Plain English. As a result of the changes made there was a much lower contact with Customer services and further savings were made as additional correspondence, such as reminder letters, was no longer required.

### As an Employer

- Analysis of workforce data has been completed. Emerging trends are identified and are now reported on annually
- Development of an Appraisal Process with a competency framework based on the STRIVE Values. The framework sets out the organisation's expectations to ensure that the way we work is consistent with the council's Values and vision.
- Successful One Council briefings and an ongoing programme of well-being events
- ELMS e-learning includes an equalities module for all staff to complete

### As a Service Provider

- All reports proposing a policy change or review require an Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIA). These are now submitted via modern.gov and reviewed by the Policy and Information team. If the EqIA is insufficient and is lacking in evidence challenge and support is provided to the report author.
- The Communications Strategy has been adopted. It sets out the requirement that all documents should be available on request, in alternative formats.

2.15 The review of equalities seeks to build on these successes. It provided a strong foundation to develop new objectives as it helped identify gaps where there are new areas of opportunity for improvement. The proposed new Equalities objectives are set out at Appendix A.

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## **3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS**

3.10 Keep the current Equalities Policy and objectives. Whilst there have been no legislative changes some of the organisational references are out of date within the Policy. The objectives have either been completed or superseded, therefore providing no ongoing challenge.

3.11 Adopt the new Equalities Policy and approve new objectives to enable the organisation to continue to improve on the way in which it fulfils the Public Sector Equalities Duty.

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#### **4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

4.1 As set out at paragraph 3.2, adopt the new Equalities Policy and approve new objectives. A thorough review has been undertaken of previous objectives and recommendations which has provided an informed basis for new objectives. Many of the new objectives demonstrate the correlation between the Policy objectives and the Strategic Planning process. Bringing equalities in line with this Strategic Planning process provides parity of esteem which in itself improves the organisations awareness and understanding of equalities.

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#### **5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

None.

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#### **6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

The Equalities Policy and objectives will now be formally published.

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#### **7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Implications</b>	<b>Sign-off</b>
<b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b>	The Equality Policy and Objectives are key documents that underpin our Corporate Priorities and support the Council's ongoing commitment to the residents of Maidstone, ensuring that the Council is accountable, transparent and involving residents in its decision making.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Risk Management</b>	All proposed policy changes and review require an EqIA. The document forms part of an evidence base for the decision	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer

	taken. It is a public document, ensuring the Council is accountable to its service users.	
<b>Financial</b>	The new Equalities Policy and objectives will support decisions made by the Council across all areas of its work.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	The Policy, objectives and actions will be monitored and reported on by the Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Legal</b>	The review of the Equalities Policy and revised objectives and actions are required as part of the Council's adherence to the Public Sector Equalities Duty.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Equality Impact Needs Assessment</b>	The Equalities Policy defines and supports the actions the Council takes to ensure that equalities implications are considered as part of the decision making process. EqIAs are a key part of this process.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Environmental/Sustainable Development</b>	The policy will support decisions made by the Council in this area	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Community Safety</b>	The policy will support decisions made by the Council in this area of business.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Human Rights Act</b>	Local authorities are required to respect and protect human rights when carrying out public functions. The Equalities Policy helps provides the Council's ability to support this.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Procurement</b>	EqIAs are a key, supporting part of the commissioning and procurement process.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
<b>Asset Management</b>	The policy will support decisions made by the Council in this area of business.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer

## **8. REPORT APPENDICES**

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

Appendix A – Equalities Objectives (Action Plan)

Appendix B – Equality Policy

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## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None