

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel

23 March 2022

TITLE:	Review of Equality Objectives
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Tony Hall – Portfolio Holder for Customer Services
CONTACT OFFICER:	Linden Vernon – Head of Democratic Services
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

**Appendices Attached: Appendix A - Equality Objectives 2018
Appendix B - Proposed Equality Objectives 2022**

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to propose revised Equality Objectives for the Council.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel support the revised Equality Objectives for adoption by the Cabinet.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 introduced the The Public Sector Equality Duty which applies to public bodies such as the Council. It supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, accessible to all and which meet different people's needs. Organisations are expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 3.2 The Equality Duty is supported by specific duties that require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty and to set themselves specific, measurable equality objectives. The Council's current Equality Objectives (Appendix A) have to be reviewed at least every four years.

- 3.3 In order to undertake this review the Council has used the Local Government Association's (LGA) Equality Framework. This sets out four modules for improvement, underpinned by a range of criteria and practical guidance that can help a council plan, implement and deliver real equality outcomes for employees and the community.
- 3.4 The suggested revised objectives are detailed in Appendix B to the report and will be incorporated into service plans to form part of the Council's overall performance framework. It is proposed that an annual update on the Council's work with regards to equality and diversity be included within the Council's Annual Report.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report relates to Corporate Plan Aim 1 - To help create a safer and healthier environment for our communities to live and work.

5. Alternative Options

- 5.1 That the recommendations contained in section 2 of the report be approved (recommended).
- 5.2 That the recommendations contained in section 2 of the report are not approved (not recommended).

6. Implications

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

Complying with the Equality Act 2010 will contribute to achieving increased safety for the most vulnerable within our communities.

6.2 Workforce

The Equality Objectives will support and enhance the Council's approach to providing a modern and diverse workforce.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

Undertaking the actions associated with the proposed Equality Objectives will enable the Council to meet their Equality Duties.

6.4 Financial Considerations

There are no direct financial implications outside of current budgets from the proposals detailed in the report.

6.5 Legal

The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the Council to publish Equality Objectives and report on their achievement.

6.6 Climate Change

The Council's Climate Change Plan includes a commitment to give priority in responding to climate change to the needs of vulnerable groups who are most at risk to the adverse effects of climate change, including food and fuel poverty and lack of access to green space.

6.7 Consultation

The proposed Corporate Equality Objectives provide for consultation with 'protected groups'.

6.8 Risk Assessment

An effective policy and implemented plan of action will reduce the risk of poor decision making and legal challenge.

MARK TRILLO

Executive Director (Governance and Service Commissioning)

Web Links and Background Papers

Contained in the attached appendices.

Contact details

Linden Vernon
Head of Democratic Services
Linden.vernon@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk
01538 395613

7. Detail

- 7.1 The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplified the law, removing inconsistencies and made it easier for people to understand and comply with. It also strengthened the law in important ways, to help tackle discrimination and inequality.
- 7.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Act) came into force on 5 April 2011. The Equality Duty applies to public bodies such as the Council and others carrying out public functions. It supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective, accessible to all and which meet different people's needs.
- 7.3 The Equality Duty is supported by specific duties that require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty; and to set themselves specific, measurable equality objectives.
- 7.4 This legislation challenges organisations to know how age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief, sex, and sexual orientation describe the experiences of local communities, both individually and collectively. Thinking about the relationship between these 'protected characteristics' explains the difficulties and opportunities arising from the diversity of local areas.
- 7.5 Organisations are expected to use this understanding to demonstrate 'due regard' to the Public Sector Equality Duty to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 7.6 The Council adopted its current [Equality and Diversity Policy](#) in 2018. Whilst this remains up to date it is necessary to review the Council's Equality Objectives which were also last agreed in 2018 and have to be reviewed at least every four years (Appendix A). These included the following actions:
- Updating the Council's Community Profile (a resource which describes the makeup of our communities by protected characteristics) and promote its use to services for the purposes of policy development and service delivery.
 - Incorporating consideration of equality impacts as part of the introduction of the report management element of the Council's committee management system.
 - Improving the information held with regards to the profile of the Council's workforce (collecting information in relation to protected characteristics).

- 7.7 The specific duties require public bodies to prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objectives which will help them to further the three aims of the Equality Duty. In order to undertake this review the Council has used the Local Government Association's (LGA) Equality Framework which was itself reviewed in November 2021. The Framework is intended to help councils:
- Deliver accessible, inclusive and responsive services to customers and residents in their communities including those from under- represented groups.
 - Employ a workforce that reflects the diversity of the area they are serving.
 - Provide equality of opportunity for all staff.
 - Meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and support any aspirations to exceed these.
- 7.8 The framework sets out four modules for improvement, underpinned by a range of criteria and practical guidance that can help a council plan, implement and deliver real equality outcomes for employees and the community. The four modules are:
- Understanding and Working with your Communities
 - Leadership and Organisational Commitment
 - Responsive Services and Customer Care
 - Diverse and Engaged Workforce
- 7.9 In addition there are three levels of achievement for each module these being developing, achieving and excellent.
- 7.10 Key service areas including Democratic Services, OD and Transformation, Communities and Climate Change, Service Commissioning and Customer Services have recently completed a self assessment against the above modules to establish the Council's current performance against the LGA Framework and used this review and identify new equality objectives.
- 7.11 The suggested revised objectives are detailed in Appendix B to the report and will be incorporated into service plans to form part of the Council's overall performance framework. An officer group will also be formed that will include key service areas to drive forward the Council's work in this field which will be led by the Executive Director (Governance and Commissioning).
- 7.12 It is proposed that an annual update on the Council's work with regards to equality and diversity be included within the Council's Annual Report.