

Policy and Resources Committee

27 April 2016

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

No

Equality Objectives Update

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy and Communications
Lead Officer and Report Author	Anna Collier Policy and Information Manager and Orla Sweeney Insight and Information Officer
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To note the progress made on the Equality Objectives in the performance update against the identified actions and measurements (Appendix A).
2. Agree that Equality Objectives are reviewed annually and aligned with the strategic planning process.

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

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

Equality is a fundamental part of the Council's core values. In order to deliver successful priority outcomes reflective of the needs of all Maidstone residents, equalities must be considered.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Corporate Leadership Team	19 April 2016
Policy and Resources Committee	27 April 2016

Equalities Objectives Update

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to review the progress of the Equalities Objectives - Actions and Measurements – set in 2015 and agree or identify areas where further improvements can be made.
 - 1.2 Agreement is sought to align and include Equalities Objectives as part of the annual Strategic Planning process with a view to this being included as part of the timetable from the start of the 2016/17 to ensure they remain relevant and focused.
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2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Equalities Act 2010 introduced the Public Sector Equality Duty. This applies to all public bodies and any private and voluntary bodies that carry out public functions.
 - 2.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty is a legal duty that seeks to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - 2.3 In order to meet the duty the Council must publish equality information and set Equality Objectives.
 - 2.4 Equalities Objectives and actions are reviewed every four years and an annual update provided. New Objectives were agreed by the Policy and Resources Committee in July 2015 for a four year period.
 - 2.5 The Council's Corporate Equalities Policy is due to be reviewed during 2016/17.
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3. PROGRESS UPDATE

- 3.1 The Equalities Objectives for 2015-19 are overarching to the Council's three main roles and are set out as follows:
 1. **Community Leader** – we will engage with residents in an open and meaningful way.
 2. **Service Provider** – we will ensure our services are inclusive, accessible and support residents and customers.
 3. **Employer** – to have a workforce that feel valued and respected.

- 3.2 The Actions and Measurements were identified to improve the performance and monitor the achievement of outcomes. Five actions were set to underpin the Equalities Objectives for the Council as a 'Community Leader' and the Council as a 'Service Provider' respectively and a further four actions for the Council as an 'Employer'.
- 3.3 Achievement of the Equalities Objectives can be seen at Appendix A through progress against the identified actions and measurements.

Good Performance

- 3.4 Overall performance across the three overarching Equalities Objectives has been very good. Clear progress has been made in the action areas for each objective as highlighted below.

As a 'Community Leader'

- 3.5 The Communications and Engagement Strategy was adopted in 2015. As a core value of the Council, Equality is embedded in the strategy and in what it sets out to deliver. The following have been delivered as part the Strategy's Action Plan:
- Pictorial guides for services, including recycling, to help overcome literacy and language barriers with residents;
 - Designed materials that adhere to guidelines such as minimum font size which take account of visual impairment requirements; and
 - Imagery in designed material reflect a variety of ages, genders and backgrounds
- 3.6 The Resident Survey was undertaken between September and December 2015. 2,008 responses were received with a balance of responses across all wards. The survey saw an increase in respondents from 18-24 year olds, traditionally a low responding group. The survey response rate for our BME community was lower than our BME population and this will need to be investigated further. The percentage of residents that agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area has increased 8% since 2013.
- 3.7 The results of the Resident Survey have provided an extremely useful and important evidence base for policy development and decision making. The results have been analysed by ward and demographic using the Acorn Customer Insight tools and an action plan is currently under development.
- 3.8 To ensure instil of the values of good customer experience 'The Customer Experience' delivered by 'Theatre&' was commissioned. This was mandatory for all staff and managers and encouraged staff to consider the following:
- How we can all work together effectively to ensure we deliver Excellence in Customer Service;
 - How much do we think we are individually involved in the Customer Experience; and
 - What happens if we don't get it right and what can we do about it.

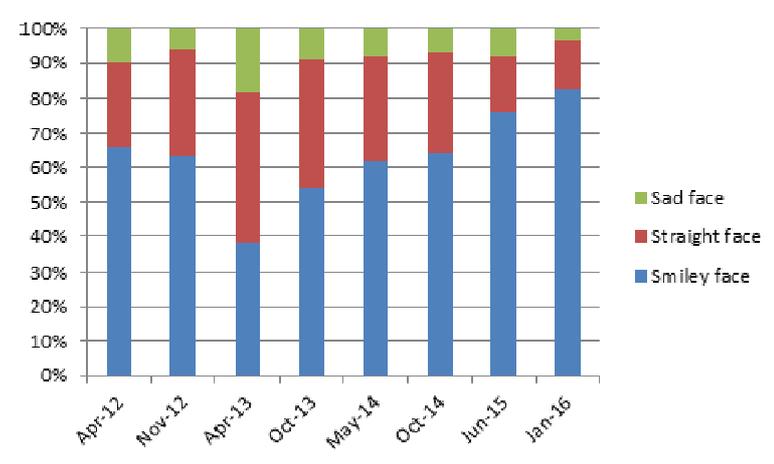
- 3.9 The Customer Experience training directly addressed Equality and Diversity issues. Through role play unacceptable behaviours which are outside the Council's core values, were addressed. Staff were shown how to effectively handle such scenarios should they arise.
- 3.10 To ensure the information and advice we provide uses language that is clear and concise, a customer friendly writing course has been introduced for officers who are required to write frequently to customers.

As a 'Service Provider'

- 3.11 Delivering the Customer Service Improvement Programme assists in the Council's delivery of its Equalities Objective as a Service Provider. There are a number successes that should be noted for this action, these include:
- The introduction of an appointment system, assisted digital points, free Wi-Fi and free council phones in the Gateway;
 - The introduction of more online forms - an online form for residents who need to renew parking permits was used by 68% people who renewed permits during January and February 2016; and
 - Council Tax bills and other standard letters were simplified in 2015 and as a result contact made with the Council, following receipt of Council Tax bills, was reduced by a third.
- 3.12 The progress on the action to 'Promote the Financial Inclusion Forum to partners and third sector as an opportunity for sharing best practice and networking' in the past year has included dementia awareness training for partners via the Alzheimer's Society to help when dealing with residents living with dementia to manage finances.

As an 'Employer'

- 3.13 One Council is designed to bring the whole organisation together. It is used to inform staff of organisational changes and to create a sense of unity and belonging across the workforce.
- 3.14 Eight 'One Council' briefing sessions have been delivered since 2012. The most recent One Council briefing took place in January 2016 at Lockmeadow. Feedback showed it to be the most successful to date (as shown in the table below):



3.15 The Council's Health and Well-Being offer was brought together in an informative booklet produced in 2016 for staff. This was circulated electronically and is available on the intranet for reference. Full details of all the Health and Well-Being opportunities available and how to access the services are included.

3.16 Current workforce profile (Appendix B) shows that the Council's workforce in terms of gender is an accurate representation of the demographic of Maidstone. The most recent data available from nomisⁱ puts the male population of Maidstone at 49.38% and the female population at 50.62%. Similarly the Council's workforce has a slightly higher number of female employees at 53%.

3.17 The Council's disabled workforce is 8% which is slightly higher than the population average of 2.9%ⁱⁱ

3.18 The Employee Age Profile shows that the highest number of employees are aged between 40 and 49 years. This is in line with the most recent population data provided by Kent County Council.ⁱⁱⁱ

3.19 2015 saw the highest level of net migration to the UK recorded at 330,000. The Office for National Statistics has released an interactive map showing the number of non UK born residents by area. In Kent Maidstone is ranked joint 4th with Dartford with a non UK population of 11%. It is extremely important that the needs of Maidstone's diversifying population are recognised and addressed in the Council's Equalities Objectives. Workforce data should also reflect this by reporting on the ethnicity of employees.

Areas for Improvement

3.20 Whilst there are areas of notable success in terms of performance against the Equalities Objectives there are obvious areas where improvements can be made. Updates on actions and measurements are currently provided by the lead officer, giving, in the main, a qualitative measurement or assessment of annual progress made. It is intended that, going forward, all actions and measurements will be put on to Covalent so that quantitative performance data and further insight can be provided.

As a 'Service Provider'

- 3.21 The Policy and Information Team review all reports to ensure an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been undertaken if a change to policy or service delivery is being proposed. However there is opportunity to further embed an understanding of Equalities across the organisation.
- 3.22 The findings of the Equality Data Review, carried out in 2015 as part of the development of the current Equalities Objectives should be revisited to establish a more cohesive approach across the Council for collection of equalities data.
- 3.23 The review found that there were gaps in the data currently collected, making it hard to assess inequality without quality data. It identified that there was no 'one size fits all' in terms of equalities questions but question formats could be more consistent and that here are some areas where it would be easy to collect equality information about service users where no data is currently being collected.

As a Community Leader

- 3.24 There was a delay in the appointment of a Parish Liaison Officer due to a departmental restructure. The post of Parish Liaison Officer was appointed to at the end of 2015. This role is responsible for carrying out an annual survey with parishes to establish levels of satisfaction; enabling the Council to improve its communication and engagement in this area.

Next Steps

- 3.25 For the Council to embed equalities and maintain focus with specific performance measurements in place it is proposed that the Council reviews the Equalities Objectives, actions and measurements annually and in line with the Strategic Planning process.
- 3.26 Neither the Stress Survey nor the Best Companies Survey has been undertaken since 2012 and 2014 respectively and for good reason. High Levels of stress were identified in the Stress Survey and the Council has focused on improving health and well-being. This is to continue for a sustained period so that when the surveys are undertaken again; there can be accurate assessment of the success of well-being activities in reducing stress.
- 3.27 With Maidstone's demographic likely to diversify further in the coming years with net migration to the UK increasing, it is important that this is reflected in the organisation's Equalities Objectives so the needs of all residents can be considered. The results of the Resident's Survey and action plan will further inform this development of this important strand of work.
- 3.28 If Equalities Objectives were reviewed on annual basis and aligned with the Strategic Planning process the Council would be able to ensure that they were relevant, focussed on the Council's greatest area of influence and that

equalities remained at the forefront of what the organisation is doing, and when it is doing it.

4 AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 4.1 Note the progress made on the Equality Objectives in the performance update against the measurements set and agree the recommendations made. Agree an annual review of Equalities Objectives.
 - 4.2 Note the progress made on the Equality Objectives in the performance update against the measurements set put forward alternative recommendations for the timetable of review.
 - 4.3 Note the progress made on the Equality Objectives in the performance update against the measurements set and request that the current period of review for Equalities Objectives is satisfactory.
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5 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the progress made against the equalities actions and measurements and the recommendations made to improve performance going forward.
 - 5.2 Setting Equality Objectives is a statutory duty, failing to report progress against the agreed objectives could result in the relevant actions becoming unfocused and in turn the objectives may not be achieved. Recommendations set out in this report seek to refocus the current Equalities Objectives on an annual basis by aligning them to the Strategic Planning process. In order for this process to begin in the next Municipal Year the Policy and Resources Committee need opportunity to consider the report and recommendation at the earliest opportunity.
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6 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Equalities is fundamental to the organisation's core values and should be considered as part of everything the organisation seeks to deliver through its Corporate Priorities.	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications

Risk Management	None	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Financial	None	Section 151 Officer
Staffing	Training involves all staff. Raising awareness of Equalities Objectives ensures that they are embedded as part of each individual role and the organisation as a whole.	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy and Communications
Legal	The Council has a statutory obligation as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty to set Equality Objectives.	Legal Team
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	EQIAs form part of the objectives.	Anna Collier
Environmental/Sustainable Development	None	Anna Collier
Community Safety	None	Anna Collier
Human Rights Act	None	Anna Collier
Procurement	None	Anna Collier
Asset Management	None	Anna Collier

7 REPORT APPENDICES

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

- Appendix A: Equalities Objectives 2015-19. Progress Update – Actions and Measurements.
- Appendix B: Maidstone Borough Council - Workforce Profile

ⁱ Nomis - Official labour market statistics (ONS)

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ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.kent.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/14725/Mid-year-population-estimates-age-and-gender-profile-bulletin.pdf